MY STORY

LEEMAN L. HUMPHRES

1995

To my Nephew Lee Humphres.

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MY LIFE STORY...

Beginning about the age of four years -

I was living with my parents, W. P. (Will) and Clem Humphres. Our address was Route one, Vina, Alabama. We were just about eight miles south of Red Bay, Alabama, and four miles west of Vina, in a community called Bear Branch. Bear Branch got it's name from the little stream that ran winding westward through this small little community in the country. About twelve families lived thereabout, with all the love and friendship any community could ask for.

The neighbors were always there for each other if another family needed their help. All the people were farmers and if a neighbor got sick, or even got behind with working their crop, the other people - even whole families - would come in and help work out that person's crop. Everyone would then go on with their own work in their own fields until the next family needed help. Then the cycle would start all over again.

I'm reminded of the time my uncle Cleve's wife became ill (no one could know then that she would be sick for many, many years) and all the people living all around began to help in every way they could. We were hoeing and plowing cotton on this rolling hillside. Someone noticed there were some long skips (or spaces) from one plant to the other. The men folk thought it would be good to let the people who were hoeing the cotton dig small holes in those skips, and have the little people take pea seeds and drop them into the holes. Then when the plows came along the side of the cotton the holes would be covered with dirt and the seed would be covered and that way my uncle Cleve would not just have cotton in the fall but would have a good crop of peas also. And who do you think rated the job of dropping the pea seed? The little boys from four to six years old, which included me!

I will just have to tell about the beautiful gray mare - or I might say white - because she was more white than she was gray, and the pretty little horse colt she brought into the world. My dad was always trading for fresh livestock, so here he came in with this big mare, not knowing she was bred before he traded for her. So here he was working the animal every day, because this is why he bought her, that he might have a better

animal to plow that year. Sure as God made little green apples, we looked down toward the barn and there stood Daisy (that was the mare's name) with a pretty little iron gray colt trying to get milk from it's mama. This I had never seen in my whole life. In fact I didn't even know where little baby animals came from, but I was determined to get close to that cute little animal. On my way to the barn I heard my Dad say, "Son, don't go into that pen!" I couldn't help but wonder why, but when the others of the family began to come to the barn no one had to tell me to stay out of the pen, because Daisy was going to protect her offspring and that she did at first. But in a few days she didn't seem to notice the family, but the dogs didn't stay in the pen very long, and everyone on Bear Branch had from one to four dogs.

About my sixth birthday, members of my family began getting sick with measles, and this went on for a few weeks. My mother began to wonder and to think maybe I was going to miss the disease, but it seems that as all the older ones began to get well and back to work in the field, I began to get some fever, and the others had not run very much fever. This caused my mother to think something else was happening. Sure enough, the next morning came and the measles were

showing through red skin. Mother felt better for a while, but since the fever continued she got upset about this and sent for Dr. Thorn who lived at Vina. Sure enough, there was something else more serious than the measles. I had also developed diphtheria, which was another infectious disease. My mother told me much about what happened sometime later. I guess I was too young to remember all about this, but a few things I do remember, such as how sick I was and that the doctor came every day for a while and that he would give me pennies for taking the medicine he had left for me the day before. I really don't know how long this sickness lasted, but I remember being so weak I could hardly stand on my feet. It seemed to last forever. But soon the carrying of water from the spring and other chores I could do brought me out and I was soon back to self again, and I could go back to the barn and see the colt we had named Prince.

Another thing I remember that happened about that time was that an uncle, my mother's brother Oscar Harris, came to visit us after everyone had gotten well. Uncle Oscar (about 35 years old) and some other boys got out visiting around one day and my uncle got hold of some strong drink. Then he decided to do some shooting with a pistol he had. I don't know if he was

loading the pistol or what happened, but he fired through the roof - not the ceiling for we had no ceiling in the house - just the roof. That was when my dad asked my uncle to put the gun away. Then there were some funny things that happened about then. Some other men of my mother's family came. Most of her folk lived around Wheeler and Booneville, Mississippi, so they didn't come very often. Anyway, when they got to our house it was about time for dinner, so my mother put dinner on the table and asked everyone to come in and eat. The cousins of mine said they were fasting, for what cause I don't remember or maybe they didn't give a reason. But later on came supper time and they still wouldn't eat. I guess my dad had a little mean streak in him and stayed awake for a while that night (may God forgive me for this and my dad for the mean streak). When he heard a racket in the kitchen, Dad got out of bed and peeped in the kitchen, and there the fellows were helping themselves to the food. Of course my parents told me about this, but the boys went home and I guess they were never told what happened.

For some unknown reason my mother's people and our family were never very close, but I guess in the late '20's and early '30's Booneville, Mississippi, was a long way from where we lived in Alabama.

There were a few times as a child that there were a few visits between their family and ours. One visit I will always remember was a day we children played in the hay loft and a cousin fell the ten or twelve feet to the ground, and broke her arm. Her name was Flora Horton and I have not seen her since we have been grown. Her family moved away to Missouri and our paths have not crossed since. There were so many of Dad's people and Mother's people, that I guess we were not expected to see them all.

Getting back to the neighborhood in which we lived at this time. I was born to my parents there on September 6, 1922. We lived there until I was eight years old. Our closest neighbor was my oldest brother, Dewey. I was the youngest of ten children and Dewey and Lydia had a son almost my age. Living so close, Virdo and I were together about everyday. We went to school together, church together, worked in the field together, and spent the night together a lot. But then we got to slipping over to each other's house. Late one day I went to Virdo's house without telling my mother and at supper time she missed me and started looking for me. Yes, I heard her call for me, but I was having supper with Virdo. And soon I was snatched from the

bench behind the table, and on my way to my mother's table to eat together with the family. And no one left the table without asking to be excused. So the trip home was kind of painful, and I assure you it wasn't just the palm of my mother's hand that was painful!

For some reason my Dad always allowed my mother to do the discipline at our house, but when he spoke he got greater results than Mother did with her switch. Only once did my dad spank me, just with his open hand on the top of my hand. It was nothing really, but he got my attention.

FAMILY

I spoke earlier about Dewey being my oldest brother. Here is a list of the brothers and sisters:

Brother Dewey - Born 11/16/1898
Brother Chester (Chess) - Born 8/20/1900
Sister Merdie H. Singleton - Born 5/12/1902
Sister Altie H. Singleton - Born 8/23/1905 12, 1987
Brother Thomas Jefferson - Born 7/4/1908
Brother Ellis - Born 5/3/1911
He was 83 in the year of this writing.(1994).
Sister Rona H. Creekmore - Born 5/4/1915
Brother William (Bill) - Born 11/18/1917
Brother Freeman - 11/8/1919
And, of course, my name is Leeman Lorice, born 9/6/1922.

Here are some interesting points about our family of ten children. Our dad lived his life mostly in Alabama except maybe a year at Bay Springs, Mississippi. The rest of his life he spent in Franklin and Marion Counties. Our mother was born and raised in Prentiss County, Mississippi, until about the age of thirteen when her parents moved to Franklin County,

Alabama, where she met our dad. They married about three years later, but during that three years mother would walk with her dad, Bob Harris, some five or six miles to a church called Chestnut Flat, in the Brazell Community near Vina where he would preach each Sunday. Grandpa Harris was a Free Will Baptist minister. They would then walk the distance back home. Then after my parents got married, my Grandpa and Grandma Harris moved back to Prentiss County, Mississippi. They died some years later and were buried near Bay Springs, Mississippi - at Newsite, I believe.

My dad was a farmer and sometimes he would work cutting stave bolts. They were cut from big timber that was then cut into maybe three foot lengths. Then these lengths were split it into large quarters and hauled to the railroad to be sold to dealers in timber who were buying for some timber company. This and farming was the way he raised ten children. Dad died when he was only sixty three years old. My mother lived much longer. She was eighty-nine when she died.

By the way, my mother's name was Mary Clementine Harris. And her mother was named Mary. So my grandparents were Bob and Mary Harris.

Dewey and his wife, Lydia, raised five children and a sixth one died when she was two years old. Dewey also farmed and did sawmilling. He owned his own sawmill for some time, and also owned and operated a gristmill where he would grind corn for the people of the community. He did whatever there was to make a living for his family as long as it was honest. Dewey was also a Baptist minister. He lived a good long life and died on June 24, 1979.

Chess and his wife, Rena, had seven children. All lived to have families of their own, but most of them passed away at a young age. Clemmie Lou, one of the girls, is seventy-one now and has lived longer than any of the others did.

Chess lived about all of his married life in Mississippi, but did go to Arkansas for several years and farmed among other things such as overseeing the farming operation for someone else. While there he also operated a grocery store, and he ran a gambling place in Hughes, Arkansas for a while. His wife, Rena, came down with tuberculosis while they lived there and had to stay in a TB Hospital for a year or more. When she got better they came back to Mississippi. They both died there after several years. He died August 13,

1981.

Merdie lived most of her married life at the same location. She and her husband, Enos, raised four children. Cecil was the youngest. Soon after he returned from a hitch in the army he got killed in a car wreck. The other three children, Alfred, Paul, and Verdie are still living at this time. Merdie died February 26, 1983.

Altie and her husband, Monie, raised a family of four. All are living at this time but none is in good health. They moved to Illinois after their children left home. They stayed there for several years, then came back and bought a home. Then Monie died a year later at age 58. Altie lived several years later and died on February 12, 1987.

Thomas and his wife, Beadie, lived in Griffin, Georgia,in their last years. They both were in the nursing home there until recently, when he died at the age of eighty-five on June 4, 1994. She died a few months after he did. Tom and Beadie raised six children - four boys and two girls. They are all still living -Dorothy, Oneda, William, Z. L., and twins Waymon and Laymon. All except Z.L. have families and they live just about over the United States. Thomas was also a timberman about all his

married life, except for a little farming on the side. They lived most of their working life in Franklin County, AL.

Ellis and Viola live near Red Ray, AL. Four of their children are living and little Ruth died when she was very young. Her name comes up among the family conversation very often. Ellis had his 83rd birthday on May 3, 1994. His wife, Viola, is near the same age. Ellis's living for his family came from farming, and sawmilling, except when he stayed in Illinois for a while and worked in factories there.

Rona was born on May 4, 1915, and her husband, Hollis Creekmore, lived in East Florence, Alabama. Hollis met his death in an explosion which ripped through the cast house of Reynolds Metal Company in Muscle Shoals, AL in 1967. That explosion killed Hollis and three of his fellow workers. Five more died later, making a total of nine men who died. Forty more were injured. That was the worst explosion in the history of Reynolds up to 1967. Rona had cancer for sixteen years and died several years after her husband on June 20, 1973. Rona and Hollis had two children, Harold and Geneva.

William (Bill) and Earlene lived all of their married life at

Rt. 1, Vina, AL. Bill's work ran from farming to salesman. Earline was a librarian in the Red Bay Schools for about thirty years. Bill was a disabled veteran of World War II. He passed away on October 23, 1988. Earline died ten month's later. She had cancer. Bill's birthdate was November 18, 1917.

Freeman was born November 8, 1919 and he died November 20, 1984 in Oklahoma City, OK. He had been living there for some thirty-five years. He was moving around a lot until he settled down there in Oklahoma City. I think before that time he had lived in Mexico and other places in the northwestern states. The first few years we didn't know where he was but in 1949 we as a family became concerned about his whereabouts. We did start searching for him as soon as we discovered he was gone. We made trips to where he had been living in Chattanooga, TN.

We knew that he had bought a tractor-trailer rig and was making two trips a week down to Tampa, Florida, to pick up whatever was to be pulled to a transportation company warehouse there in Chattanooga. Then, for whatever cause, he left his truck to be serviced at the service station he always used and never came back for it. That was how the news got to us. Of

course, there was a lot of speculation among the officers of that city. A lot of people were questioned but no real leads were found. The hunt went on for almost a year and still we had no news from him.

So in 1952 I moved my family to Aurora, Illinois, and lived there for eighteen months. While I was there I worked with a fellow that knew a man who could help me so I began the search again. But this time it was with high hopes. I will not call names for fear of getting someone in trouble. But within two weeks I received a letter from Freeman at nine o'clock in the morning. At 9 o'clock the next morning I got off the train in Oklahoma City.

All this caught me without very much money to travel on, so I went to my brother, Ellis, who was living next door to us at the time. He gave me what money he could spare and a good friend gave me what I needed to make the trip to Oklahoma City and back to Aurora, Illinois.

As soon as I reached Oklahoma City, I taxied to Freeman's address and found an old lady keeping a few boarders so she might make a living for herself. Not knowing what I would find or what to expect, I didn't identify myself at first,

but a few words and the lady knew just who I was and she called my name. She said Freeman was always talking about the family and calling my name. She said he would say, "My younger brother Leeman". She even recognized my voice from hearing talk for so long with Freeman. She said I sounded like him.

The lady didn't spend any time getting Freeman on the phone. That is when I learned the two of them were expecting me. Within a few hours we were on our way to Alabama. Our mother was still living at that time, and we planned to come by to see her and spend a few days visiting with the family and then go on to Aurora to where my family was.

We left Oklahoma in an old model Ford (1942) that didn't look like it would make it to the state line. I made a remark about that and Freeman said, "If it breaks down we will leave it on the road and catch a bus home!". The Ford fooled us, although we did have to pour nine quarts of oil through the motor. The last time I saw that car it was in water that went over the top. I will explain this: Freeman was on his way from work about 1:30 a.m. when a levee broke open above the road. With the road being lower than ground level it flooded the road and about three

cars were caught in the lower part of the road. This all happened after we got to Aurora, Illinois where my family and I lived at the time. Freeman had taken a job there.

Leeman - I was the last child of ten children and as it usually goes I might have been expected to be a mama's boy, but not so with me. My dad was the pride of my life and a real buddy. I went everywhere my dad went, even to the field to work until he became unable to work. By that time I was big enough to plow with a mule.

My wife, Jewel, and I had three children - all girls. We taught them to work hard, and earn their place in life and never to look back on the hard life of a farm girl or to troubles that they could do nothing about.

AGE EIGHT TIL MARRIAGE
December 18, 1941

My dad raised all ten of his children with he and my mother working someone else's land until I was eight years old and I don't think any of us ever went hungry or went without anything that we really needed. We did have food and clothing.

When he decided to move from where we lived in Bear Branch Community, he chose to buy a farm that he could call his own. He bought eighty acres of land just outside the community we lived in, and there I lived until I became a man - or at least man enough to get married, and for Uncle Sam to call me into the army.

I was really proud when my dad told us we were going to move to our own place. My first thought was that I would not have to carry the water up the hill. At the new place we would have a well of water almost in our back porch, and the well had a shed over it that came all the way to the porch. I think everyone was happy about that.

There were only four of the

children - Rona, Bill, Freeman, and me - at home at the time we moved. Thomas and Ellis just dropped in once in a while. They were not married, but were working some place else. I did a lot of growing up in a few short years while living there. Of course we walked to school. That was about two miles one way, and the evenings were the most fun walking home from school with all the children in our community walking together. We had to cross Hurricane Creek. The creek had a foot log across it with a handpole to hold onto while crossing, but if it was warm we would just wade across in the water. By the way, this community was known as the Hurricane Creek Community. We had a lot of young people there and there was always something going on - like a party of some sort, and maybe sometimes there would be a dance.
It was always a square dance, someone would call the sets, while the music played. If there was not enough grownups, the children would fill in for them. That was a common thing in those days and most everyone could go through a set, even the little ones.

At one of these dances was where I had my first girl friend. Her name was Eva Parker, who was a sister to ex-mayor Parker of Red Bay, Alabama. I think we were about eleven or twelve years old.

In those days the whole family would attend, the fathers made sure order was kept. But then came along round dancing, which the parents called hugging dance, and they did not approve. So that is when the dancing parties ended in our community, but we were still allowed to meet in different homes and play games. There was still a lot for young people to do. When weekends came everyone would go to church on Saturday night and Sunday, still enjoying themselves as a group of young people.

That was about the time that my family began having a get-together for everyone. They always met on the 22nd of December in those days. That was my mother's birthday. We had it on the same day for many years and there was always a yard full of people if the weather was good. If the weather wasn't good you could look for a noisy bunch of people inside. When my mother passed away on February 4, 1967, someone said at the funeral that we should keep the reunion going. One of the grandchildren thought the first Sunday in June would be a good time, and so it is still going strong until today. The only change has been from Sunday to the first Saturday in June, which is working out well. There are always close to a hundred people there every year. They come from other

states as well as from close around.

There are only two of the ten children today, but there is a great number of the grandchildren and many friends so close to the family, and we are always glad to have them come. I believe the reunion started the first year we moved to the farm my dad bought when I was eight years old, so that would be about sixty four years that the reunion has been going on.

When all ten children were living the crowd was larger. It seems as one of the them past away their children have lost interest, but the group we have coming now seems to hold out year after year.

We did a lot of other things in our family, really for fun and also for food. In summer time when it came a rain that kept us out of the fields we would go fishing. There were several streams nearby and they all had lots of fish in them. Sometimes we would go at night and fish for a while, then set our hook out for the night and go back before breakfast next morning and bring in our catch. In those days we always caught some fish and always ate them. Later on as the years passed and insects began to pester the cotton and the gardens, people began to poison the crops and gardens. It didn't

seem to bother the fish in the streams for a few years, but soon it began to contaminate the waters and the fish began to die. Soon there were no fish in the smaller streams, but it still seemed everyone loved to fish.

Then, of course, we also hunted in the winter. Back then we hunted for meat but we also would save the pelts or hides of the coons and opossums to sell. Sometimes we brought in a skunk or a fox.

Speaking of meat, we would sometimes have a good fat opossum and we would fix it with sweet potatoes and bake it in the oven. It was very good, but if we wanted wild meat the squirrel was always good for meat. Of course, years ago, the turkey was around for the kill but then something went wrong with the turkey population and they were gone from this area of Alabama before people realized they were going. Now, with the game laws we have, people are hunting turkey again after about forty years without them.

People had good hunting dogs in those days and they were trained to tree as well as run the animals. Usually the dogs were of a mixed breed and they were strong.

My brother Freeman was our dog

handler around our house. He was always good at selecting one that would be a good dog for treeing. Sometimes he came up with a rabbit dog. In those days people ate rabbit. My mother would fix them in a lot of ways. Some that I remember were rabbit hash (very good) and sausage. Rabbits were good baked or fried. When we brought in several she would work all day and would fix them in different ways. She was careful not to lose any of the meat.

The way the boys hunted sometimes was just with the dogs and a stick they carried in their hand. People back then would say that to use a dog to run the rabbit and then stand there with a shotgun in your hand and wait for the rabbit to run by and just shoot it down was not being a good sportsman. So the gun went and the stick was in. But when they really wanted meat they would carry the gun. Too, back in those days, there were big rabbits in the bottom land near the streams. The big ones were called "Cane Cutters" because they usually bedded up in the cane breaks (that was where the cane grew that we used for fishing poles) where there was a lot of cover for them to hide in. Then, like the turkey, they soon disappeared and I haven't seen a cane-cutter rabbit in thirty or forty years.

MAKING SYRUP IN THE LATE FALL SEASON

One of the things everyone looked forward to when the fall weather began was the time of getting fodder off the cane we had planted and raised to make our syrup to eat during the winter. When the cane was stripped clean, we would cut it down and haul it by wagon to the mill. There it would be pressed to get the juice out of the cane, then the juice was run into a syrup pan. There it would be boiled down to a syrup. While it was still hot the syrup would be poured into buckets or even glass jugs.

Each farmer who had raised the cane would pay the man who owned and operated the mill a toll for making the syrup. I believe people would give the man about one gallon out of five or ever fifth gallon. The other syrup would be taken home for the family to use for sweets during the winter. There were so many ways my mother could use the syrup! She would use it to make ginger bread and all of we kids would always eat our fill of that. Then there was the molasses cake

which was made in the shape of any other cake. Sometimes she would stack it and put chocolate icing on top. That really was a treat!

People would come for miles around to see the syrup mill at work. Some of them would be glad to work for molasses at the mill if an extra hand was needed. Then there were the sightseers who came by just to see the operation at work. The molasses maker would always let the visitors sample the cane juice as well as the syrup. Then if anyone had more syrup than they needed, the visitors would buy a few gallons. In those days syrup was about fifty cents a gallon, but the problem was that most people didn't have the fifty cents in those days. They always left with their syrup anyway.

THE TRUCK WAGON AND OTHER PLAY THINGS

This was before the little red wagon days. At our house we wouldn't have had the money to buy a little red wagon anyway, but my dad and the older boys would help me saw up some small blocks from a gum tree. Not just any gum tree would do - it had to be what they called a blackgum which was very tough so the wheels could stand a lot of bumps and knocks. We would take four blocks of wood, which were about two inches thick, to the house and take an auger and bit and bore a hole in the center of each of the four wheels big enough for the wheel to fit over an axle. We would do that for all the wheels then we would add the frame. There was no steering wheel - we would steer with our feet on the front axle. We would get to the top of the hill and down we would go. After a few trips down and back to the top we were ready for a rest.

Then some of the boys in the community whose father had small bulls would take the bulls out of the pasture and work them to their truckwagon, but me - I wasn't that lucky. We always milked someone

else's cows.

Then all of a sudden, I was getting too big for the truckwagon game! It then became other games such as doing a lot of hunting and fishing as I mentioned before, but it was more serious this time than before. This went on until I began to have to help my dad do other things. He was getting to the point he was hardly able to work, so since I was always with him I did all I could to keep him from having to work so hard. I was really concerned about him. From then on he was getting weaker as the weeks went by. His legs would swell really bad at times, and the veins would puff up almost as big as a finger. We got him to a doctor after a while. People didn't have much money in those days and no insurance at all to pay doctor bills, so they just went to a doctor when they had to go.

WE HAD WORK AND JOY ON THE FARM

After going through a long and cold winter on the farm, there was so much work to be done in the spring of the year to get things ready for farming.

One thing that had to be done was that my Dad always wanted all the stables and sheds cleaned out where the horses and other animals had stayed penned up during the long winter nights. We would get all that compost and take it out and spread it on the fields for fertilizer. It was better for the crops than any fertilizer you could ever buy.

We would get the wagon placed in front of the stable door and take shovels and dig up the compost and load it on the wagon. Then we carried the wagon to the field and scattered the compost over the field. This was done each year in early spring and it left the stables nice and clean.

With all the work that went on around our house, my Dad always

took time in the morning to have his breakfast and to encourage all the children to have a good breakfast. There was always ham from the smokehouse and biscuits and gravy. My mother, and in later years, my sister would put the coffee pot on the wood stove and let it boil the coffee while the other parts of breakfast were being prepared. Then if the coffee was not getting hot, they would lift an eye from the top of the stove and place the coffee pot directly on the fire. This way it would soon be ready by the time the rest of the breakfast was finished.

After breakfast the work began and we stayed with it until 11 o'clock. Then it was dinner time for everyone.

For some reason my dad never would let my mother go to the field with us. Sometimes she would come later, but my dad would send her back to the house to fix the dinner. My dad and mother always got along good and I think it was because they loved and understood each other so well.

To get to the fields from where we lived, we had to cross a bridge that was never in good condition. My dad was always afraid the mules would break through the bridge (it was a wooden bridge) while crossing. Bridges

were bad on most of the roads we had back then, and sometimes people would unload from the wagon and only let the driver of the team ride the wagon across. A few times I have seen them take the mules away from the wagon and lead the mules across, then everyone would push the wagon across to the other side. That was kind of scary to me as a child.

I mentioned the smokehouse earlier. This building was very important on the farm. It was a little house with no ceiling in it. It would have a large bench or table on which to place the meat. It was usually built in the yard near the kitchen door. This way, whoever was doing the cooking had easy access to where the meat was stored.

All the neighbors were called in for the killing and dressing of the hogs. After hogs were killed they would carry the meat into the smokehouse and place it on the table where it would be salted down. Both sides of the meat were rubbed really hard to work the salt into the meat. The meat was placed then in a nice fashion and more salt was poured over and around the meat. Then it would stay there until they thought the meat had taken up enough salt to preserve it. That depended on the weather. If it was real cold the meat would

have to stay bedded down longer, but in the warmer weather the meat would thaw out and take the salt quicker. After it had taken enough salt it would be taken out of the salt and all the lose salt would be washed off. Then the large pieces of meat would be hung close to the roof of the smoke-house. Then the smoking would be started. We would build a fire using hickory wood along with some apple limbs to make the smoke. This would give the meat a great taste after the meat had been hanging there for several days. Everyone wanted the meat to be a glowing brown color before it was taken down and put in a tight box. But we just left it handing in the smokehouse until it was used up.

There were also lots of fatty scraps that had been removed from the meat before curing. These were rendered out in the washpot in the back yard. Some of the children would have to stand watch to keep the dogs away because there was only a small fire around the pot. The small fire was kept to keep the fat lard from having a burned taste. When it was finished the lard was put in 50 pound cans and placed in the smokehouse along with the meat. People used the lard to fry foods and to season vegetables.

This work was always done in

one day. After all the work was done, the children had the job of taking a small mess of meat to every home in the neighborhood.

When the hog was killed, the meat all fixed for the winter, the lard rendered out, and each mess of meat delivered, the long day was over and everyone would sleep well that night. The next hog-killing would be at another house in the family community.

In those days there were all different kinds of fruit in the woods and around the fields and there were berries and nuts everywhere that people could use for their livelihood. And they did use them. All the things I will mention were available in the fall. When the leaves began to turn brown you could start looking for them.

I will start with my favorite thing first. That was the muscadines. They could be used in many ways. They could be canned for later use, or jellied in jars, but they had to be used soon after they were picked. Everyone liked to go muscadine hunting. They were usually found around the fields in the bottom land areas.

Then there were the wild grapes, which were sometimes called opossum grapes. They were really sour but made really good jellies.

They got their name from being eaten by opossums. Some kinds of fowl also ate muscadines.

In the early fall, just when we would be picking cotton, we could usually find a mulberry tree around the field. That was also a wild berry, with a sour taste, much different from the tame mulberry we have today. My mother never used them, except to gather them right from the tree.

Well, did you every hear of the huckleberry? They were all over the woods when I was a boy. There were the tall types of huckleberry bushes, and there was a ground huckleberry. There was also a gooseberry. They were of the same berry family, but were much bigger berries. We would pick some just to eat fresh but never canned any, as some other people did.

Of course the blackberry also grew wild. We still have them around today. They were used to make jams and jellies and they made really tasty pies. Then there were the dewberries. They were very sweet and everyone loved the dewberry pie. The difference in the blackbery and the dewberry was that the blackberry grew upright and the dewberry grew on a running vine along the ground. The blackberry seemed to be everyone's

favorite. Sometime people would go blackberry picking in the morning and stay all day long.

Then there was the crab apple. They grew on small trees about five to ten feet tall, and were so sour they could hardly be eaten. But some people did use them for jelly. You could sometimes find them where one side of the tree could get the sunshine, but if the tree was in the shade all day they would soon die out.

One of our communities' best hickory nut trees was a big one that stood in the middle of our neighbor Dan Jackson's pasture all by itself. I never remember this tree not bearing its fruit and I wonder sometimes if the tree is still standing. I would like to go back there some time and just look around. It stood near Bear Branch, where we kids went swimming almost every day during the summer months. The nuts were shaped like an egg. Sometime you would find one almost 1 1/2 inches long. They were very easy to crack open and to get the meat from them. Sometimes we kids would just go to the tree and set there with a rock to crack them open and our pocket knife to pick the meat out and eat them under the tree. Of course, the squirrels took their part of the nuts.

I really think that was the

only one of that strain of hickory nut I ever saw. Maybe that is why it was so special. Wild nuts are better to eat after the frost begins to fall.

Most of our young people liked to eat persimmons. In the early years there was plenty of them around the fields. Most often they grew on the higher ground and the trees sometime grew to 20 or 30 feet tall. They were very good to eat in the late fall and winter. They would hang on the tree until after Christmas if the opossums and coons left them alone. Of course, people gathered them, too. I remember my dad picking a lot of them and making persimmon beer when I was a child. Of course there was no alcohol contents in the beer he made. It had a very good taste.

The persimmon was a golden color when they were ripe and had a good taste. If you happened to pick one that was not ripe then it would pucker your mouth.

Now, there was also the chestnut trees. They grew all over the woods in my childhood. They looked like the tame chestnuts we have today, except the wild ones grew much larger. The tree sometimes would be 12 to 14 inches through the trunk of the tree. In those days we boys on the farm would go barefoot all summer and

our feet got tough on the bottom. We would play a game and see which one had the toughest foot. Each one of us would try to crack the chestnut burr open with the heel of our foot and that was a tough chore.

The chestnut that grew wild disappeared in just a few years. I think they began to die out during World War II (1941-45). As far as I know there are none left around our area. There were many different stories about their disappearance but one would wonder if anyone really knew.

There were other foods that grew wild in those long ago years that people could use. These that are mentioned here were always used.

The wild plum, both red and yellow, was looked out and gathered to can. They made wonderful tasting jellies and preserves.

We can see that there was quite a variety of foods to choose from in those days when we consider all the fruit, berries, nuts, apples, peaches, plums, water-melons, and muskmelons.

All the fruits, berries and nuts we have mentioned were good if you took time to fix them up right. My mother always seemed to know

just how to prepare each one to bring out the best taste. And the few years that Jewel and I lived with my mother, she taught Jewel how to prepare about all the food - canned, baked, jams, jellies, cakes, pies and many others. Back then there was a way to mix these fruits that would make mouth-watering dishes.

DATING DAYS AND MY FATHER'S DEATH

At this time I was seeing the girls in a different light than before. Maybe they began to look like young women.

Where we lived we had to walk about a mile one way to where we got our mail. Then in later years the mailman began to go through our community. I was the one to go to the mailbox to pick up the mail, so one day I noticed a girl I had been seeing for some time, sitting on the porch of a home I had been passing almost every day. But today it was different. The guitar she was playing and the song she was singing was so pretty and beautiful. But the young lady I could not describe. I did know I had to see her again soon, and soon I did. She and some of the other young people were planning a party and she was practicing a song she would sing at the party. The next day I received my invitation right from the girl in person. Really I had known this girl for a while, but this time a relationship began that went around the clock several times.

We were in and then we were out for a year or two, but we always come back together. And then love began to invade our lives and we never looked back until we said "I do." That was forty-seven years before she passed away on May 24, 1988. In all those years we made it through good times and bad times, healthy times and sickness.

She took care of her mother the last three years her mother lived, and before that she helped to take care of her dad for the very short time he lived after a stroke. The stroke was almost fatal. He died at our house.

Now getting back to our courtship: we went to parties in the community, we went to school (Hurricane Creek), we went to church at the community churches, and to the movies in Red Bay. We even made a couple of trips to the hospital in Memphis to see my nephew, Alfred Singleton, who had a broken back. In fact, there was a truck load of people who went to Memphis. The reason for the truck load of people was because not anyone in those days had very much money so everybody chipped in and hired a truck. That way everyone could go. While we were there we went to the Memphis Zoo. We had a great time, but on our way back it seemed like the clouds burst open and all the water fell on us.

I guess you have already decided we were riding the back of the truck. Even though we had a large tarp, it was so hot no one could stay under it so the rain felt better than the heat. So we killed two birds with one stone, so to speak. We visited the sick as well as seeing the things at the zoo.

Well, I didn't mention the song Jewel was singing that day on the porch where she lived with her family. The title of that song was "A Jewel Here on Earth", which I had heard all my life. But it never sounded as beautiful as that day - and did you notice that her name happened to be "Jewel"? Maybe that is what made it so special to me.

About this time my Dad began to get worse day by day, and the family was very concerned about him. Whatever the doctor was doing just wasn't helping him. He was still trying to stay up, but a lot of the time we would come into the house and find him laying on the bed. He got weaker and weaker until he was not able to be up at all. I guess God was good to him and to the family, for in a few weeks He took Dad home. So much happened during those short weeks!

We always had a lot of company both day and night. In those days

the friends would sit up with a patient all night if they were seriously ill. Not many of the people were sent to a hospital in those days. The doctors would treat a patient at home because doctors made house calls back then.

Because my dad was my best friend and buddy, I was always in and out of the house to check on him. He was always talking to the visitors about living right and doing good. He asked to see a boy who lived in the community whose dad was a good friend to my dad. The man came in and my dad asked him to sit by the bed because Dad was already to weak to sit up. I guess no one knew just what they talked about except the two of them. But the man was not a Christian, by any means, and everybody seemed to think this was what they discussed. The man went on living as he had always lived until he was a very old man, then he was saved. He didn't live very long after that. My dad was a friend to all the young folk in our community.

My dad's life was just about over by this time and everyone had begun to get very serious about him. Then on the 17th of December, 1939, at about 5 o'clock in the evening he passed away.

I stood at the foot of his bed

before and at the time of his death and listened to him describe the beauty of heaven, as if he was looking right into Heaven itself - the streets of gold, the beautiful river of water, the twelve gates made of pearls, the angels dressed in pure white.

I stood, watched, and listened to every word but at that time I had little knowledge of all the things I was hearing. If it were today I could understand every word. I do understand it all now and that gives me great pleasure. When I stop to look back on the death of my father, I also know now that he didn't die - he just fell asleep in Jesus.

Anyone who might doubt this statement should stop long enough to study the New Testament and really see what death is all about for those who can call Jesus their Lord and Savior.

Now then, before I get into writing a sermon there are some other things I want to write about. My dad was buried the next day - the 18th of December. When we returned home from the funeral it was just my mother, my brother Freeman, and me. Freeman would soon go to Birmingham to work. That would leave just me and my sick mother. She had been sick for several months and was forcing

herself to go on because of my dad being so sick. We began to do the best we could. I had been taking it the best I could for some time. I knew it was not going to be good for me or my mother, but even as sick as she was she still had so much faith that things were going to work out just fine. And it did after a while.

After we got settled into a routine things worked much better. Soon after my dad's death I started to work with my brother, Ellis, who had built a house near us so he could help us out some. He had already been cutting timber for C. C. Blackburn, who had been saw-milling for as long as I could remember and was sort of a pillar in the community. Mr. Blackburn worked several men at the mill and then there were those who cut the timber and those who logged the timber to the mill. Ellis and I started cutting the timber and things worked out well for me. Ellis gave me half of the contract, which meant I would have to do half the saw filing, and pay half of all the expense we had. I did well with everything except the filing of the saw. That took me a couple of weeks to learn. It seemed as though I just about did all the filing.

And, I might add, this was no

motor saw like they use today for cutting timber. It was done in those days by muscle and guts, from the time the sun came up until the sun went down. Or, if it was cloudy we started when we could see and worked until we couldn't see. Then if it was raining, snowing or sleeting when we got up, every one went to the mill. If the rain or whatever weather we had stopped we would work. If it failed to stop by dinner time (mid-day), we went home. And I, like everyone else, had so much to do when I got home! We were off every other Saturday and then I did washing and ironing. And the washing was done outside on an old rub board. We would rub our clothes up and down the board until they looked clean. Then we would rinse them in clear water to get the lye soap out of them.

The clothes were hung on a line to dry, either outside or on the porch if it was raining. Then the next day we were off to the woods again trying to make a little food money.

A few more words about washing and ironing. My niece, Clemmie Lou Humphres, sometimes would come to help out some and this one time she brought an old girl friend from way back yonder. They got into the washing and ironing while I was at work, and I thought they were doing a very nice thing helping me out

like that. My mother was just barely up and around, but I kind of felt like she knew what was taking place. These girls didn't just wash and iron, they also starched the clothes for me. I was not good at starching clothes and I was really proud of them until I was dressing for church. Then I was not able to put my pants on because of the starch in the pant legs. This was one on me, and I thought I would live long enough to get this back on them someway. But I'm seventy years old now and it hasn't happened yet. After all, it was a very good joke, and I didn't have to starch those pants for a long time after that day.

The family was all really good to help us out. They all knew that my mother was very sick. She was sick for a few years, but everything worked out very good until one evening I was plowing in the field and a root hung my plow. The plow jerked and that caused the plow handle to hit me in my side. That caused my appendix to be bruised from the impact. My appendix soon ruptured and gangrene set up. After the operation I was knocked out for a few weeks. The neighbors came to my rescue again. Someone finished my plowing, and then when the cotton was ready to pick in the middle of August they came again and picked my cotton completely over the first time.

When it was ready to be picked the next time I hired some help and was able to work by then so all was going well again. Even though I didn't have my corn gathered when everyone else was ready to go back to work in the timber, I just went to work with them and got my corn out when I could do so later. We could always take a day off now and then.

I had not been seeing too much of my girl, with the sickness and death of my father. But when things began to settle down we started seeing each other more often. Her dad was a night watchman for two or three sawmills, so her family would move around a lot so he could be as close as possible to where he worked. There were times we were quite a way apart and the only people who had a car were the wealthy ones. That certainly left my family out.

But we always kept in touch and after a year or so she came back to our community and started back to the same school (Hurricane) I was attending. This was great for both of us. Of course we both had made other friends, but none was serious, and we began seeing each other again. But I guess this time was more serious.

I was two grades ahead of her

and I soon went on to Vina High School. But having just lost my dad and with my mother continuing to be sick, I was having a pretty hard time of it. I did most of the cooking, the work in the house and the work in the field during the time we were making the crop. So when the gathering had to be done, I decided to quit school. But I still saw Jewel as often as I could.

By this time war talk was raging and everyone knew we were about ready for World War II. My brother, Bill, was called up. Then there was the invasion of the Hawaiian Islands by the Japanese, so Jewel and I began to get very serious because we knew it was just a matter of time and I would have to go to war.

We couldn't decide if we wanted to get married before or after I came back, but the decision had to be made soon. Jewel thought we should get married right away and try to have a child before I had to leave and that was fine with me. Our first daughter, Lorice, was born before I had to leave - strong and healthy, she was. During my training in the states, we were able to be together a lot. Most of the training was in Texas, and we three lived off base. I went home to them about every night.

The places we had to live were not so good but we were just glad to be together as a family and, believe it or not, we had a very good time. We lived in Austin, Texas. Austin is the capital of Texas and was pretty far away from post. I finally found a small cabin in Basdrop, Texas. That was just a hop and a skip away from post. I could get on the bus on the corner by my barracks and be at home in a matter of minutes, so we settled down there for the rest of my hitch in Texas.

I suppose I need to fill you in on the wedding. First of all, I had less than ten dollars in my pocket when we decided to get married. The trip to the court house for the license, the license, and paying the minister all was less than the money I had.

That was December 18, 1941, remember? Not quite as costly as today. Neither of us ever regretted doing the wedding as we did. We visited Jewel's parents, had plenty of witnesses at the wedding, and when we got to my house, there was a good meal with a wedding cake - not a fancy one, but still as pretty as the bride (almost). She wore a beautiful blue dress for the wedding and I wore a blue suit that I borrowed from my brother, Bill.

One thing that really got our attention was the preacher who did the honors, Rev. Robert Spencer. He was a great man of God, but he would never marry any couple when he was standing looking crossways of the flooring in the building. We stood where the seams in the floor were running from where he stood to where we stood. This was quite new to us, but we had a good laugh after we left his house.

The car we used was a great big black Hudson. Our driver was Louie Gene Jackson. He owned the car and was a friend of mine. He past on as a middle aged man. He was a fine boy when Jewel and I married and he grew to be a fine man. I don't think he ever got married. He left Vina a few years after our marriage and died before returning to his home town.

We picked up Jewel (my going-to-be bride) at her home near Vina in the Blue Creek community. We stayed there for a while. The reason for the delay - Jewel's father asked us to wait for a few minutes and he left. He soon came back with a bottle and was disappointed when everyone turned him down.

We stayed for a while longer then decided it was time to go and get the marriage over. That we did, and then went on to my house

for supper and the reception. A few of my family came in and some of our school friends were there. That was about the size of our wedding. I don't think either of us would have changed a thing had there been a different circumstance. Louie Gene Jackson carried us right to the doorsteps in the car. That was a great day for both of us.

We got up early the next morning, which was not unusual for either of us. Ellis and I were cutting timber, as I told you earlier, but we both stayed home that day. It was a Thursday. I guess he thought I didn't want to work the next day after my wedding, but Ellis knew where we could get some good kindling for starting fires in the fire place. We were still using wood in those days to heat the house as well as in a wood stove to cook on. With a fire in the stove and in the fireplace, we had no trouble heating the house.

So, before the day was over, Ellis and I got the mules and wagon together and went to the woods to get the kindling and were gone the rest of the day. So that was the way Jewel and I celebrated our off day from work the next day after the wedding.

After all, I guess we had some good years together and a lot of

hard work that started as soon as we were married. In those days only the rich could afford to take a long honeymoon or a cruise on a ship or even a trip to some other state or county. We had to work long hours every day and most Saturdays to keep food, clothing and a shelter over our head. But once in a while we would go to a movie in Red Bay. My cousin, Arlin Humphres, had a car and we would get together with a few young people on Saturday night and go for the first show to keep from being out so late. On one of those Saturday nights on our way home from the movies we were going along a gravel road and the lights on the car were giving trouble. We came upon a wagon and almost ran into it even though we were going very slow. That gave everyone a real scare.

In the springtime we all left the sawmill behind and went home to start farming. I was glad, for this meant Jewel and I could be together more. We already knew there was a baby on the way. We had planned very carefully, but in those days parents never knew if it was going to be a boy or girl. We were happy to let it be either one.

When I began work in the field Jewel wanted to go every day I did, and she did that very thing even though we knew there was a baby on

the way. The next thing that happened was that she began to plow some. Then she wanted a mule of her own to plow. So the next rainy day I went looking for a mule I didn't want to buy. But when I came home late that evening I brought home a mule and a brand spanking new wagon. I bought the mule from a friend of my Dad's (Garvin Davis) from whom he had borrowed small amounts of money for many years. And I got the wagon, well, another fellow (David Morrow) who had known my Dad for many years just let me have the new wagon. And he let me pay for it when I could. As far as I know I never signed a note at all. But before you start thinking they really trusted me - no, it was not me but my Dad, that they trusted. They knew he had died, and that I was trying to carry on the farming operation.

So when I started to plowing, Jewel was right there beside me plowing her mule which she really loved. We began carrying our lunch to work with us so we would not have to spend the time going to the house and back for lunch. We would sit at a spring nearby and eat our lunch and watch the mules eat what we brought for them.

We got all our fields planted out and every thing was going well, except Jewel had begun to show a little and was getting bigger all

the time. That was when I began to think I had let her work too hard. I knew she had always worked hard but this was different. I had never been responsible for a wife and a baby before, but she loved every minute we worked together. We were a real team, and as long as she was well, and before she began to show signs of Alzheimer Disease we did things together.

By the time we got our crop planted I was back cutting timber for the time we were off. Then when we got our crops worked out and were through laying by for that year we went back to the woods and worked a while. Then it was time to start gathering in the stuff we had grown - corn, cotton, and hay, mostly. And, of course, we had a big garden.

I must tell about the garden. My brother Ellis and his family had moved out of the other house on our place and my sister, Rona, and her family moved into the house next door. So being the buddies my sister and Jewel were, I knew I would have to "toe the line". Right away they were going to do the garden and plow Jewel's mule. And they did and they worked really hard.

One day a big red mare I had, which my Dad owned before he died, had lost her shoe from one foot. I

set out to put another one on her and the mare would not stand still for me to tack the shoe on. I lost my temper and whipped up on her pretty good and here came my sister and Jewel running and yelling "Don't you be whipping that mare!" That was my first encounter with women folk. Oh, yes! They had their say but I finally convinced them that the garden needed some more work.

Now as the summer was drawing to a close, we knew for sure that I would be leaving soon. Maybe it would be after the baby was born. We were keeping our fingers crossed and trying to live our lives together one day at a time. The days soon passed and the mailman brought me a notice that I was being called up for a physical, gave me the date (9/10/42), and told me to report to Fort McClellan, Alabama on that date.

There was a lot of us fellows who left Red Bay that same day and we were back with our families the next day. While I was waiting for the call to report for duty a beautiful little girl was born at our house and I realized our plan had worked out well.

I left my family there at the farm with my mother, but I knew it was for just a little while and Jewel also knew she would soon have

to make a change. So soon after I got settled in at Camp Maxey, Texas, I got a letter saying that my brother Tom was buying the farm and that they would send the deed for me to sign very soon. The deed came and I took it to the office and signed it before a notary and sent it back home for them to complete. Then the farm belonged to my brother Tom. We were just glad the farm was staying in the family. It is still in the family after all these years (54 years). My nephew, Paul Singleton, owns the farm now.

The baby, Lorice, was born September 22, 1942 and I was inducted October 31, 1942. Of course that was a day a man will never forget. As we waited by the mailbox on Cotton Gin road for my transportation to the bus, of course my wife and our new baby were there with me. My Mother, some of my brothers and one sister was there as well as a few friends who came along. By this time it was nothing new for bus loads of men to be leaving for the army.

I was inducted, as I said, on October 31, 1942, at the camp of Fort McPherson, Georgia near Atlanta. I was there maybe four or five days, just long enough for all the paper work to be done. A lot of this paper work would follow me all the way to Germany and back.

While I was waiting in Fort McPherson, I was in my barracks and I heard an ambulance go screaming by. Later I got the news that someone had been hurt bad. This was the first I heard about the gay crowd. Of course, way back then in Alabama we hardly understood those things, but one boy had made a pass at some other fellow who got very upset and hit the first fellow in the head with a wrench he was working with. I never heard any more about that scene.

About the fifth day I got my orders. Several of us would soon be pulling out by train going to Camp Maxey, Texas near Paris.

That was where my army training all began. I knew there would be a lot of long nights and rough days ahead of me. I had already begun to miss my family, and I was determined to bring them to Texas as soon as it was possible. But at this time I knew it would have to be after our basic training was over. That would be thirteen weeks at the least.

I just about counted every day that went by.

IN THE ARMY NOW

The train pulled out of Atlanta soon after we trucked from Fort McPherson to the depot. This didn't take long and we were soon on our way. Really, we were halfway to Texas before we got the word where we were going. The army has little secrets like that. But when I found out where we were going I was well pleased. I had never been to Texas, or for that matter, anywhere else very far from Alabama.

That old train kept chucking on down those tracks and the next evening we pulled into a station inside the army post. There we were asked to line up in columns of two's. From there we marched to our barracks and each man was assigned a bed. There would be a platoon of men in each building. A platoon consists of three squads and has a total of forty-two men plus the platoon sergeant. The platoon sergeant had a little room to himself at the end of the barracks.

By the way, there were two floors in most of the barracks and there was a platoon of men on each floor. The floors were very well kept and from the time we moved in it was our responsibility to keep

them clean. It was the platoon sergeant's duty to see that every soldier did his part of the cleaning, and that his bed was made up the army way - tucked and folded at each corner. We were learning this from the very first. After we learned to make our bed properly we went on to other things.

Also, they stressed discipline from the very beginning, and those who refused to take orders from those in command would do the extra work, like picking up trash from the grounds. Or a fellow might have to pull K.P. (kitchen duty). That was mostly washing dishes or sweeping and mopping the floor - just things that would remind a soldier that he was in the army. And that he was supposed to work with the team. If we hadn't learned that we would never have won the War.

We had not really been out on the drill field yet, but were still getting the feel of the organization and having a few classes on how to work as a group, either large or small. One evening after we had come in for the night, everyone was busy doing this or that and someone came in the door carrying all his gear. I looked up and he was no stranger to me. It was Troy Jackson, a boy I grew up with and played with when we were small boys. We were together

through most of the war after that evening.

The training consisted of things such as marching, learning how to keep in step together, and taking twenty-five mile hikes and a lot of other things that would toughen us up. Along about November 14, 1942, we began a training program that would go on for thirteen weeks and every man was required to pass all the tests. A lot of it was how to protect yourself and at the same time to keep a level head, so as not to give the enemy the advantage.

While we were at Camp Maxey we finished our thirteen week training program and they had been giving out some leave time. Jackson and I both got a leave for ten days, I guess, but not at the same time. When his leave came up he went home and stayed his ten days, but didn't return back to post. Then, of all things, the First Sergeant (Martin) called me in and asked if I would like another trip home. Of course I did. So he said "This will be a business trip. I want you to go bring Jackson back to camp." Still that was no problem, so then the sergeant pulled a gun out of a bag along with a gun belt with live ammunition, and a band to go on my arm like the military police wore when they were on duty. By this time I was having other thoughts

about all this. Another leave home would be nice but I couldn't see myself coming home to pick up my best friend with a gun hanging on my side. So I asked the sergeant if I had to do this. He only said they might get someone else to go. He dismissed me and I went back to work.

I found out later that I had caused a lot of trouble by not going after Jackson. They contacted the military police in Huntsville, Alabama. They came to Red Bay or Vina, near where Jackson lived and where we both grew up. They got the police there to go to his house and pick him up for them. About a week or so later they brought him to the company and then to the stockade (jail). I never gave a thought that the company would have a way of punishing me for refusing to go pick up Jackson. But the First Sergeant called me in again, gave me a clip of live ammunition, and didn't ask this time if I would but said, "You will be Jackson's guard for the next sixty days." I was to pick him up at the stockade in the morning and bring him back for training during the day, then take him back in the evening.

People change so much when they are in the army that I didn't really know what to expect from him. One day I decided I would

have a talk with him about maybe if he had in mind trying to escape. He assured me he didn't and I believed him because I had known him all our lives and he was always truthful, even if he was punished for it. So from that day on I was more at ease about the matter. I would have quit loading my gun but didn't know if someone would check to see if it was loaded. So I just kept it loaded every day. No one ever checked it.

By this time, we were ready for some advanced training. That was going to be a lot tougher than we had been given up to this time. It would consist of every phase of combat. I had another leave home by this time and had gotten a promotion to buck-sergeant and was assistant squad leader. I began to think my first sergeant was maybe trying to make up for the punishment he had placed on me by having me guard my best friend.

Anyway, I was always glad to get the chance to see my wife and baby. Seemed like every time I was home the baby had grown a lot and she had no idea who I was. But in the ten days I was home I was able to get better acquainted with my daughter.

Now with the new responsibility I had, it meant I had to pin myself down to doing my job.

I still felt the First Sergeant was having something to do with what was going on. We had become very good friends and, to tell the truth, he was a good man and a good soldier. He had been in service some fourteen years at the time, and was in his forties so he knew the army inside and out. I was kind of sorry for him having to cope with a bunch of twenty year olds who knew very little about army life. But there were others who were regular army men and, with what regulars he had to help him, things went good I guess. At least they kept pushing us along from one training exercise to another.

By now we were having a lot of training on land, as well as on water. Of course, the water training was done in the post swimming pool. Once in a while we would go out to a small lake and do rescue training from the water, or just for swimming and learning to stay afloat. I already knew how to float on water, but to do it the army way was different - having to float long enough to rest from swimming. We also had to be able to relax while floating.

The training on land was also stepped up as well. There were more hikes as well as more battle-field or combat exercises. We would go through the real enemy

thing, shooting blanks of course. When we advanced enough in this type training, we then would be moved to another camp for even more advanced training which would be more rugged than we had ever done before. This even made it more interesting because you never knew what was coming next.

STILL IN THE ARMY

When our training was over at Camp Maxey we were told that we were relocating. We knew things there had begun to be slow and stale, so I guess this was all planned from the beginning of our training.

We moved halfway across Texas to Camp Swift which is near Austin. Austin is the capitol of Texas. We were moving from Paris which was close to the Texas-Oklahoma border and about forty-five miles south of Hugo, Oklahoma. Paris at that time (1943) had a population of about 25,000. Austin, being the capitol, was much larger with a population of more than 345,000 people.

For some safety reasons they didn't tell us just where we were going until we had boarded the train and were on our way. Of course the boys who were from the state of Texas were thrilled to be going to Austin since they had lived in the state of Texas all their lives and never been to the capitol. The state is so much bigger than our small state of Alabama where we can just jump in a car and be to our capitol in a few hours.

It had been almost a year since I entered service at Fort McPherson, Georgia and came to Texas for my basic training. Now I found myself deep in the state for more advanced training and I was sure it would be a lot more extensive training than we had had before. I was now a squad leader with the rank of staff sergeant so I was able to get information that I had not been able to get before. I had heard that for some reason we were not getting the training we should have been getting. I do know that we had begun seeing officers being replaced by new ones and the company commanders were changed several times in the last few months. We had some lower rank officers, like second lieutenants, who transferred for one reason or another. One, or maybe two of them, had been shipped out for playing cards in the barracks with the enlisted men. That was completely against the rules.

But now everything was beginning to get very serious. I was able to learn that we had to do some tough training because we were far behind where the army commanders thought we should be.

Even with all this going on I was ready to bring my family to Texas and I began to plan for that.

I knew the first thing to do was to write Jewel at home and see how she felt about it and she didn't waste any time answering my letter. They were ready to come. Then I had to put in for a leave and I got one right away. Troy Jackson was already home and the First Sergeant asked me to bring Jackson back with me. This was the first leave that he had since he came home and refused to come back, so I guess the sergeant thought I could persuade him to come back with us.

The Sergeant knew I was planning to bring my family back with me, so everything worked out well. I got home and they were excited to be going back with me. I looked Jackson up to see if he would go back with us and we visited around some among the family, but I couldn't wait to get started to Texas with my wife and baby. Jackson was ready when we were, so we boarded the train in Red Bay with a couple of packed suitcases. Every thing was fine until we got to Texarkana, Arkansas. There we had a long layover. Jackson and I got to talking and he told me that his pass had run out. I thought for sure he would get picked up by the M.P.'s again, but we didn't get checked all the way through. It was late at night and we stayed together in the depot.

Jewel and Lorice napped some sitting upright on their seat. Jackson and I stayed awake. The place was so crowded I didn't dare sleep because we had several hundred dollars with us. About three in the morning someone came in and said for everyone to stay in the station because two men had tried to take his money off him. One came from the back of the man and got a bear hug on him and another went through his pockets. But the soldier was able to get to his knife and he killed one of the men and hurt the other pretty badly, or at least they thought the man was dead when the people picked him up.

Then about daybreak we were able to get on the train that would carry us to Austin, Texas, from there. But while we were struggling to get through the crowd I heard Jackson say, "Leem," (that's what he had always called me since we were kids) "Look, I've lost a handle off Jewel's suitcase." He was carrying it for her and while pulling it through the crowd of people the handle had broken.

We had to go by way of Dallas, Texas, to keep from changing trains again and it was late when we arrived in Austin. We all stayed in a hotel there and the next day Jackson and I went to camp and reported in. I was sure that

Jackson, being A.W.O.L (absent without leave) would get into trouble again, but no one said a word as if they didn't notice. Of course, I knew better because the N.C.O. who was on duty had to keep up with those things. He might have been a good friend to Jackson, and just didn't turn him in. He had a lot of friends there and then there were a few who just didn't bother him.

I had heard a boy telling another to watch out for Jackson. That he was dangerous if he got mad.

That evening I went back to the hotel in Austin. Then the next day I went to a the small town of Basdrop. (I had some time left on my leave.) In Basdrop I found a small place for us and got a fellow to carry me to pick up my family and by dinner time we were moved in. Of course it didn't take long to move two suitcases. That place is were we lived until we moved to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

We had a very good time there and made some friends. Where we lived was a chicken farm in the edge of town. It was nothing like the chicken housing in Alabama. Those buildings were small, about ten by twenty feet. And each building was separate from the other and all the buildings were

set in a circle and went in that circle from the entrance around and back to the place we entered. There was a big courtyard in the middle. It was a pretty place to live. We didn't have much room but nobody needed much room. We needed just a place to cook and eat and a bed to sleep on.

The weather was warm there and the kids liked to play outside. Everybody looked out for everyone else. We were all in the same boat. We just wanted to be with our families. Also everyone shared what they had. There was a mess sergeant who lived there and just about every day he would bring home whatever was left over in the mess hall where he cooked. And he would bring just as much as they would let him bring. If it was more than he needed for his family he would give some of it to the neighbors. We lived next door and he just about kept us in meat. We would have steak, pork, chicken or fish about every day. We even had turkey once in a while. Most canned foods were in gallon containers so we would divide them since none of us had refrigerators. Jewel got to being good friends with the lady who owned the place and she would let us have ice and let us leave our milk at her house.

On one occasion one of the men had to be gone for several days,

and it was real hot and the only cooling any of us had was a small fan. The ladies had missed the man's wife for a few days and finally decided she had gone home while her husband was on duty and couldn't get back. Then on a real hot day the women and children were on the court yard and began smelling an odor. They investigated and thought it was coming from this lady's house. Someone called the police and they went in and found the lady dead. We didn't get much information but some thought she might have taken sleeping pills. Of course there were a lot of rumors but no one really knew what happened.

Everybody was saddened about that for a few days, but soon got on with their lives. Soon after this happened, I was on duty at camp for whatever reason and Jewel was still shook up some. During one night a loud noise behind the house awakened her. The pounding was shaking the whole hut, so she got the baby out of bed and went to the landlord's house. After she got them up the old man - I think he was the lady's father - went out to investigate and found a cow rubbing against the house. Of course the pasture fence was almost touching the house. So they were able to sleep the rest of the night. The next evening I made it home and all was well. I didn't

have to stay away very often - maybe a night now and then.

There were times we had fun and we were just glad we could be together with our baby.

There was a horse barn nearby and we would rent horses and saddles to ride when we had enough time off to ride them. I had a special friend from Bolivar, Tennessee - Verlis Alexander - who would ride with me a lot. He came about every Sunday. Jewel and Lorice both got to liking him a lot. He began to take Lorice on the horse. At first she was afraid, but soon she didn't mind the horse at all. But then it was Jewel's time to be afraid when Verlis decided he would take Lorice outside the court for a ride. Lorice loved every minute of it, though. Then after that it was every Sunday. Sometimes we would take out time for dinner and cook up a good meal and enjoy that. Verlis didn't live through the war, but I'll get into that later.

Now then, getting back to our training at Camp Swift. Things began to step up some, and we had a training schedule we had never thought about before. We found out in just a few months that the training we had before was almost like play.

We were taken down to a big lake (or we hiked down) several miles from camp. The water was blue as the sky. We took rescue operations and swimming lessons as I mentioned before. Then came what everyone was dreading - the rescue operation. For this they brought in a big size boat with all the rescue equipment and took out several men at a time to the middle of the lake. Then they had two or three men at a time jump overboard, with the boat moving forward. Then the other fellows would rescue them by throwing out a rope and life preserver for each man to hook his arm over so he could be pulled in by the men in the boat. Then the men would hoist him over the side as if he were unable to help himself. Of course there were days of hand to hand combat, also bayonet practice which was done with the bayonet on the gun barrel. We would jump up out of a ditch or trench then run 10 or 15 yards and jab a big dummy as if it was a real man. The training went on and on until everyone was exhausted. The next day it would start all over again until everyone got the hang of whatever training we were doing. Once in a while there would be a 25-mile hike that would begin at five o'clock in the morning and last until we could get back. And then there might be barracks that needed to be scrubbed and that was done down on your knees with a

stiff brush and soapy water. Then the next morning we would have to be on the firing range by five o'clock ready to start firing our rifles at day light and fire them all day long. And maybe this would be the day that we would only have hardtack (some kind of dried food) to eat and that might be so hard you could hardly eat it. If someone grumbled about this, the answer they would get would be "When we get overseas you'll be glad to get these." I found that to be true. Once, I remember, we only had bread and orange marmalade. The bread was baked by a German bakery, and this went on for three weeks. This was all the army could get to us to eat. Of course most of us didn't really believe we would go hungry until we made it to the front of the battle. There we found just about everything a lot rougher than we ever had it in training here in the States. When a fellow comes face to face with live bullets the tune changes altogether.

We didn't know at this time of the game that it would be several more months before we were ready for overseas duty, so we all began to realize that our training had not been up to army standards.

In a few months there we had real fierce training from morning until night, but when we did

finally get to the war zone we used a lot of the muscle and gut training we had received.

By the way, I had studied in school about the Colorado River. The town of Basdrop, where we lived, was on the banks of the river. It was a surprise when we finally saw it for the first time. It must have been at least fifteen or twenty feet down to the river bed at the bottom, and hardly enough water in it to wade in, let alone swim in. Most places a good jumper could jump from one side of the water to the other without even getting his shoes wet.

Our training program kept me so busy that I was not getting to stay with my wife and baby very much and the talk of our going overseas was being rumored pretty strong. Everyone was getting worried, especially the wives, so Jewel and I began to think that our time together was about to come to an end. We started making plans for them to get back home. I checked on the schedule that the trains would be running and found that if I carried them to Waco, Texas, (about 90 miles away) and put them on the train there, they would go by way of Dallas and would not have to change trains until they were in Texarkana, Texas. There they would feel like they were almost home. We talked this

over for a week or so and decided it was best.

So we begin pinching pennies so they would have enough money to make it home on. We had several hundred dollars that we carried out there with us, but didn't want to use our savings. We wanted to get it back in the bank at home for emergencies if there should ever be one. My family made it home fine.

When the time came for them to leave, (we put off until the last minute just like everyone else) I got someone to drive us to Waco, and there we found an old rundown depot, even though Waco had a population of about 101,000 people. Old iron wagons were sitting around and along the tracks where they had been junked and pulled out in the weeds, I guess, to be used to haul freight from the train to the depot or back to the train again. The whole area was a junk pile, but at least the train stopped there. I carried their two suitcases onto the train and put them in the rack overhead, then said my goodbyes. The train was already moving out, but I still took my time with the goodbyes for I thought this would be the last time I would see my wife and baby until the war was over. So when I made my way to the door, which was already closed, I had to ask the porter to open it and he did. I looked up the tracks

and saw only on old wagon, but I jumped anyway, and into the wagon bed I landed. I felt of myself and found only a scratch or two, got up, brushed myself off and headed back to the depot. The car driver I left there said when I arrived, "I thought you had decided to go home with your family." I was a little upset, so I thought I would not answer and the driver thought his joke was not so funny after all. So we drove back to Basdrop very quietly. I caught a bus and went back to the barracks and my bunk. That is when I discovered that old chicken house we lived in was not so bad after all!

We were still at Camp Swift when I heard from Jewel and Lorice that they had made the trip home fine and were settling down okay. They soon found an apartment and moved into it and were better satisfied living by themselves. They had gone back home and moved in with Jewel's parents. I was even glad they had found a place for the two of them and it worked out better for everyone. Both of our families were able to visit with them more freely than when they were living with her parents.

After a while we received orders that we would be moving out soon, and there began a routine of more inspections from our weapons to our socks. Everything had to be

in good condition and our weapons had to be working well. This went on for a few days, then the order

came down to start packing up our barracks bags. We would be moving out at 5 a.m. We didn't know where or which way we would be moving. East was the rumor and east it was when we got on the way.

We were up and getting ready to move to the depot by the time we could see. They loaded us onto trucks and by noon we were settled down in our coaches at the railroad tracks. We didn't move out until dark. There were two train loads of us. As far as I know the whole division of troops were leaving at the same time. But, of course, there had been an advance party of several officers and enlisted men sent on a few days earlier to prepare for the troops to move in.

When the trains pulled out I was on the troop train that headed along the southern coast through Louisiana, the lower part of Mississippi, across the lower tip of Alabama, across the northern part of Florida, into Georgia, North and South Carolina, then headed up the east coast all the way to Fort Dix, New Jersey. This was half way across the United States. Then, of course, as usual we were told on our way just where we were bound. Everyone knew by

this time that it would not be long until we would be leaving for the coast of France, and we did later. But some unexpected things happened to delay us for a while which I will get into later.

The other troop train went north through Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, then on east through Pennsylvania and on to Fort Dix, New Jersey. I guess it was all planned, but those boys pulled in a day ahead of us. We began to think we were going to just live on the train.

It didn't take long to unload and get set up in our new home, which everyone thought was just a stop over on our way to fight the Germans. But things went on so long until my family and I decided they would come up for a while. They did come and while they were on their way I went into Trenton, the city nearby, and found a room suitable for the three of us and checked to see when they would arrive. I was waiting for them when they pulled in. Some of my buddies went with me just to get into town. Rules were not so strict at that point. Everyone who wanted a pass got one. The hotel was just across the street from the depot.

Jewel and Lorice stayed as long as we thought they could stay

and still leave while I could still see them off. After they left, my unit was called out one night and we were sure this was it. But we pulled out on trucks with our field pack on our back, as if we were on our way to battle, and in a way we were. The trucks headed to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which was about 30 miles away. We pulled into a large city park, unloaded from the truck, were told to line up in single file with each squad and platoon together. Then we got the order to pitch tents. I had already found out what we were there for.

We were there some three or four weeks and were very busy. Most of us were on 12-14 hour shifts and on call 24 hours a day. It seemed that the bus drivers were being threatened by blacks and gang groups and they had no protection on the buses. So the army was called in to ride the city buses so the drivers could get back to driving the buses and provide the city with transportation to and from work. There were one or two men on each bus for a while. Then there was only one man riding each bus. All of us rode with live ammunition. The working people who used the bus to get to work and back were glad we were there and they proved it to us by bringing food and drink to our headquarters for us. I remember on one of my

rounds on the bus a group of college students got on the bus. (They were also having it rough without the buses.) These lived out at the edge of the city and they asked if I would stop at one of their homes for cake and ice cream. They even went far enough to bribe the driver into letting me off until he made a loop which they knew he would have to make. It would bring him back by the house. So that's what we did. They loaded me down with cake, ice cream, and fruit. The bus driver and I ate all the way back to the depot. Of course, if the word had gotten out we both would have gotten into big trouble.

There was only one casualty while we were there. One boy got a knife in the back. It seemed to me that the army was very slack in the planning of the whole affair. We were put on crowded buses with rifles that were at least three feet long, and who could have used a rifle on a bus load of people.

So after all this was over we went back to camp thinking we would sure be leaving for overseas duty soon. But we got back into another training program that went so long until Jewel decided to come back to New Jersey and leave the baby at home.

I guess I should insert here a

little more about Jewel and Lorice's stay the first trip they made to New Jersey. They, or I should say we, had to go about a block and a half to eat. One day I was not able to get into town to eat for some reason, so Jewel carried the baby and went to eat supper that evening. There along one side of the walk was a wrought iron fence which enclosed a cemetery. They got through with supper and were returning to the hotel when a fellow dressed in a suit and wearing a hat just seemed to appear there with them, Jewel said. He first asked to carry the baby for her, she refused and the man was just going to take the baby anyway. Jewel held on to Lorice and must have screamed. There was a man walking on the other side of the street who saw what was going on and he came running toward them. When he hollered and the fellow trying to get the baby noticed the man running toward them, he turned loose the baby and ran. Jewel said the second man told her not to be out without someone with her. She said he was very nice and watched until she got inside. Jewel never went outside alone again, but as long as they stayed I was there every night after that.

Now returning to Jewel's trip back to camp without the baby. This trip was not very long, but we did get out and look around more.

There were no buses running the streets in Trenton, so we did a lot of walking around town sightseeing and window shopping. Jewel enjoyed every minute of that. And we ate like little pigs. I think we tried every dish they served in Trenton.

Then when she stayed as long as she could away from the baby, she decided to go back home. We still stayed on at Fort Dix, but they would run us four miles one day, then the next day we would go way out from camp and do very little of anything. The boys did a lot of card playing and we who didn't play cards walked about and watched the deer grazing and playing. I guess this land was inside the post but the deer were very tame.

After we decided we would be there for a while, I got to looking around and found Chester Humphres, a cousin of mine. And, of course, Troy was in my platoon so we started going into town and staying all hours of the night. Once Chester and I stayed all night on a Saturday night. We were awake most of the night. I think we ate and drank (no strong drinks) all night long. We went back to our barracks early Sunday and I slept the rest of the day.

The runs we would take most days carried us about four miles to

the prettiest community. There was a large lake that was as blue as the sky and there was a road all around it. We would always make our run around the lake. That was the hi-lite of our run each day. After that we would head back to camp wondering what we would do next. We stayed busy most of the time and I think all the fellows wanted to stay busy doing something. We didn't know why we were held up there for so long, except that the strike in Philadelphia that I mentioned earlier may have been the reason. We were never told.

Everyone was missing their families and wanted to get overseas and get the fighting over with once and for all. Some of us would go out and see a movie once in a while. Most of what we saw was war movies - I mean the real thing! Once a friend and I were sitting in the theater watching a war movie which we knew was the real thing and the boy began screaming as if we were being attacked. He soon calmed down and he said there was a boy he was raised up with in the movie. Knowing this was possible in a live movie, we were both a little taken back. We just got up and went to a hot dog stand and filled ourselves and went back to camp. After that movie, neither one of us wanted to see another one.

Things just kept being slow around Fort Dix, even with runs and the walks we did about every day. Then after a week or so things begin to change.

We started being called out for reviews before the Governor of New Jersey. After that we were asked to pack all of our battle gear, along with our personal stuff and report to the training field. There we were ordered to unpack and display all our stuff for a final inspection, not knowing after a whole day of this that we would have to do it all over the next day. Some of us realized what this was all about. We would be leaving soon for overseas. It was the officers responsibility to make sure every man had the things he would need for overseas duty. Remember, we went through all this back at Camp Swift, Texas before leaving there and now it had to be done over again. It was very slow because every item of every man's pack had to be there before we could leave Fort Dix, New Jersey. The army provided things each man needed but didn't have in his pack.

After the first battle we never saw those bags again. The only things we had were what we could carry in our full-field packs and that was a shelter half, a blanket, and our shaving gear. A shovel was hanging on the back of

our pack along with our rifle and cartridge belt full of ammunition. The belt also had a metal bottle full of water hanging on it also. It weighed 40 to 60 pounds.

After that second day of inspections we were put on standby and told it would be a few more days. We did a few things to kind of keep busy, but mostly it was things we could do nearby our barracks. We had some classes on cleaning our weapons. The training consisted of disassembling them and cleaning each part of the weapon, regardless of how small it was or how unimportant it seemed to us. Then it was time to put it back together again and hope it would work well because we knew this rifle might be the only thing that could keep us alive in battle. I'm sure every soldier had already come to the knowledge by now that "The rifle is the soldier's best friend," as they say about the dog being man's best friend.

We knew time was winding down, but didn't know just when. We had no instruction on this at all. Then came time to move to Camp Kilmer, near the port from which we would embark. And we didn't know where we were sailing to. Of course it didn't really matter for we were on our way to the battle field anyway. We had figured we would be fighting the Germans,

because of leaving from the port from which we were leaving.

Camp Kilmer was the last straw for us. We pulled into the camp about the middle of the day, ate a small dinner, and by dark we were loaded. We had climbed the gangplank with everything we would own in our barracks bag and in the pack on our back. But we knew that where we were going we wouldn't need very much.

Sometime on September 12, 1944, we departed from New York harbor and I said my prayers for my family and myself, even though I wonder now if God heard because I had never accepted him as Savior and Lord. Anyway, I climbed into my bunk and went to sleep thinking about my wife and baby, and my mother.

I doubted very much if I would see my mother again if I was gone very long and if I made it back home. The same was true about all the family and friends I was leaving behind. My brother Bill was already gone to war and I was leaving now on this September night of 1944. Mother was wearing down with all the health problems she had.

I was gone overseas from September 12, 1944, to October 15, 1945. The family told me when I came home that my mother had a

determination that she was going to see her sons return and that she did. And she lived to be 89 years old. I thought of my wife and baby everyday of that bloody war, that was all I had to look back on to keep me going and it did that. I had always liked to hunt and fish and when I had time to sleep, I would dream of the three of us going hunting in the Bear Branch bottoms I spoke about earlier and seeing Jewel all bundled up in heavy clothes and Lorice being snug in her coat. I already knew that Jewel was a better shot with a gun than I was. Then of course I would wake up and find I was only dreaming.

Back to that night of September 12, 1944. We sailed sometime after I went to sleep. When I awoke the next morning, September 13, at two o'clock and went up on deck I couldn't see a light or any land anywhere so I knew we were well on our way. I believe if I had stayed awake until we sailed out from port I would have felt better. When I came to the deck and looked around and I didn't see anything but a few men standing looking into the darkness and heard the water rumbling a little alongside the ship, I wasn't seasick but I was so sick it seemed that my heart would burst.

Then daylight began to come with a heavy fog over the water, but we could still make out another ship nearby. Then as the day wore on and the fog began to rise above the water we could see other ships farther out. Then at full light we could see ships sailing on both sides of our ship. Later in the day, someone discovered that the ship on our starboard side was filled with Wacs and that by yelling really loud the girls could hear what was being said. But the further out we got the wider space there was between the ships. This was for safety. If the ships were attacked, this way it would be harder to hit two ships at the same time. The army called it dispersing the ships and I suppose the navy called it the same.

We were on the water for twelve full days. The ship we were sailing was a British ship called the Queen Elizabeth. We did have some excitement on our sail across the North Atlantic Ocean. After we were out several days, without giving any warning at all, the officials decided to fake an attack. They dropped depth charges (these charges were used in case of a submarine attack) so it seemed when they were dropped and went off that the ship raised almost out of the water. But, of course, it didn't.

The voyage was about half over and we were still sailing on toward France. I guess it was toward England first but I don't think we had any plans to dock there, because the coast of France was already clear and the news we had been getting lately was that the Germans had been pushed well back to the border of France and Germany, with some fighting going on along the Belgium, Holland, and German borders. For some reason the Germans were not giving up Belgium and Holland so easily.

So much for the news report. As we sailed toward Europe all was quiet around us. No activity as yet, but we really did expect some sea activity after we began to get into the war zone. Maybe it was too early as yet. We were only about to the half-way mark. We had been expecting a little personal grudge activity somewhere along the way and hoping it wouldn't come.

Going back to Fort Dix, the day of the trip out in the field, where we spent the day with some of the boys playing cards and watching the deer graze and play. Well, it seemed the boys playing cards were not to gamble or bet while playing, but they did and they got caught. There were a few words passed between an officer and one of the men so the officer put the boy to running up and down the road until

the boy collapsed. And after the soldier got over the run he had more words with the officer who had punished him. The word was that if he caught that officer on deck as we were sailing the boy was going to throw the officer overboard. And at six or seven days out the officer had not been seen on deck. I really don't know what happened but some thought the officer was in trouble with his superiors and had been confined to his quarters because of the problem between the two.

We continued to sail on day after day, with every day getting longer and longer, it seemed. We were getting plenty to eat and plenty of sleep. On the days we were sailing we did very little except stand on deck and watch the fish. I was always looking out for a whale but I didn't see one. I suppose there were so many ships sailing abreast of each other that it caused the whales to go deeper into the water. We saw a lot of smaller fish. Since I'm not a deep sea fisherman I was not able to identify many of the fish I saw.

As we sailed on through the last day and night, the news got around that we were nearing England. The spirits began to pick up a lot. Everyone began staying on deck more, looking, and hoping to see land soon. But as midnight

passed and it began to grow toward daybreak we continued to look ahead.

Then sometime before light began to break through the fog (our fogs, here in Alabama, are like little showers of rain compared to a fog there), we began to see little lights flashing from a lighthouse on shore, evidently a code being passed from ship to shore and back to the ship again. Soon after this we dropped anchor and spent a few hours there before sailing on.

We were so far out we could not make out just how England looked. But we who had read and studied about England and its way of life there would have liked to go ashore. But at this stage of the war the only ones who went to England were those who were wounded and were expected to go back to the war, or the seriously wounded who were being patched up so they could make the sail back to the States.

I was always hoping I would get to go to England for a visit there, but by the time my outfit got to Europe the troops were moving inland so fast that there was no chance of making it back to England. Then I thought of being sent back through England on my way home from the war but that never materialized either. Then it was

not long until there were more serious things to think about.

Sometimes in the late morning we pulled anchor and sailed around the southern tip of England and across the English channel toward France. By late afternoon we were looking at the shores of France off in the distance. The ship was anchored. Because of the vessels and other things that had been blown up in the invasion we were not able to get in to the docks. So we unloaded onto barges with all our belongings and were towed in to the shore, close enough that we could get on a ramp that had been erected, I guess just for us, because we were the first troops to land in the little town of Chaurburge since the invasion.

I have never, in all the places I traveled in Europe, seen as much destruction as there was along the shoreline and maybe a mile or so inland. Not a building standing and all the timber looked like there had been TNT wrapped around the tree trunks and set off. And to think that Paul Singleton, a nephew of mine, was in the first or second wave of troops that hit the shores of France, and lived to come home to tell about it. Also, my brother Bill was fighting across Italy and Sicily about the time of the invasion of France.

Now I think the troops of the 102nd Infantry Division that I trained and fought with all the way across the European countries really began to see what we were facing when we landed on the shores of France and started marching inland to our first bivouac area (or our first encampment).

It seemed there was nothing standing. We reached our apple orchard (there were acres and acres of trees) in hedge row country, where we would spend a week or so for preparation for battle. We pitched tents in the rain on a very rain soaked ground and it seemed like it could just rain out of a clear blue sky. You could look up and there would be a small spot of white cloud hanging right overhead. This went on the whole time we were in the orchard.

During this time, some of the boys found a box of plastic grenades the Germans had left behind as they were retreating. The N.C.O. was higher than a kite on some vodka one of the officers had passed out and that began the big show. The men would pull the pin on one of those grenades and throw it and then fall on their faces as they had been taught in the states to do. But soon their playhouse was torn up. The company commander, Captain Conner, called them into his headquarters and

busted each one of the platoon sergeants back to private and promoted new ones. I was one of those who got promoted to platoon sergeant to take the place of the one from my platoon who was busted. That was the rank I was discharged with when I left the army.

We were about to make a march of about 14 miles, up to a railroad track where we would board a train to Belgium. The day before, I took sick with a fever and a cough that kept me coughing about all the time. I made it to the aid station and got something for my fever, but the medicine men were packing to move out the next morning and had sent about all their supplies ahead. The pills for the fever helped some, and I made the march the next day in the rain and muddy roads. We pitched tents in still another water soaked field alongside the railroad tracks and were going to move out the next day.

My friend, Tackos from Michigan, was my tent buddy and I suppose he got worried about me coughing so hard that he got out and looked up the company commander who came by my tent and saw that I was hot with fever. He spent no time in getting me a way back to the field hospital which was a long drive from where we were camping. The driver of a 4x4 truck had to go very slow, but he got me to the

hospital just as day began to break through the fog clouds.

There was only a nurse on duty at the field tent the office was in, but she got my fever checked and some blood samples. I guess she called in a doctor and it was not long until they had x-rays made and started me on medication. I waited for them to get me bedded down in a field hospital tent about 40 or 60 feet long. It had a row of beds down each side of the tent, with the foot of each bed facing the middle, with another row long ways of the tent down the very middle.

I was there about 31 days and I must have counted the beds every day I was there but right now I have no idea how many beds there were in that tent. There were other tents just like that one and each tent was full. I think what they did if they got overcrowded was to put up another tent. They all had dirt floors so I began to think, "How do they keep the water out as much as it rains in France," so when I was able I went out and looked. I found that each tent had been trenched around the outside of each wall. Of course this is the way we did the small tents we pitched in the field.

Every day I went through the same routine. I would get an x-ray

in the morning soon after breakfast. My medicine consisted of a pill for the fever until it subsided, then there was cough syrup with an antibiotic to clear my lungs of the infection. That went on for the entire time I was there. I expected some exercise after I got better, but I guess everyone was too busy with the sick and wounded. We did get out of the tent to walk around after we were better, but no one told us to do that.

The nurses were very good at their job and were friendly with everyone. The ones of us who lay for several days and were not able to be out of bed were given an alcohol bath every other day and that was like soaking in a hot tub of water. Then the nurses would go up and down the back with the side of their hands and that was great.

All the time I was in the hospital I was wondering if I would be placed back with my old unit. And I was not alone in thinking that. It seemed that everybody was doing the same. But when they could not find anymore infection in my lungs, did anyone say a word about leaving? The time to leave came soon and some of us were taken to a replacement center. I was there on Thanksgiving Day and that must have been the best dinner that I had ever had while in the service

- turkey and dressing with everything to go with it. And real sweet milk that must have just come from a dairy somewhere.

It was here that I met a fellow who overheard me and a boy I was bunking under on stack beds talking about where we were from in the States. The fellow heard me mention Vina, Alabama and walked over and ask if I knew a Burleson Mayfield. And of course I knew him well. They were in the same unit and this fellow had seen "Doc", as we called him in Vina, get killed while in battle.

His story was that Doc had a history of going AWOL and did so after they got into battle. He was gone some two weeks this time and when he returned to his unit the sergeant handed him a BAR, which was an automatic rifle with a tripod on the barrel which could be pulled down to make a rest for the rifle when it was being fired. This gun was very heavy. There was one in every squad of 12 men. The enemy seemed to search out those fellows with automatic weapons and a few days later Doc died from gunshot wounds in the line of duty.

Then came the day I was told to pack my gear, I was going back to my old unit. I think I would have walked back just to be with my own unit, and this time, like it

was when I left for the hospital, it was just me and the driver. But this time it was by jeep instead of a 4x4 truck. We made the trip right up to the front lines where I rejoined my unit and there was not a shot fired at us.

I really had a shock when I unloaded in the front of my company's headquarters in the basement of a building that had been blown to bits with shells and bombs. Lt. Leach met me outside the basement, and didn't say much until we got inside. He noticed me looking around where I could only see him and one other officer. The Lieutenant began to fill me in. There I really found out what war was all about. See, I had gone into the hospital before we had been introduced to battle. Of course I knew it was to kill or maybe get killed. When I left my unit back in France, a captain was the company commander, and there was a full staff of platoon leaders who were 2nd Lieutenants. There were four platoons and there was a 1st Lieutenant who was second in command to the commanding officer. As I said before, Lt. Leach was second in command when I left, but now he was the company commander. But he was still a 1st Lieutenant as he was when I left the unit. The war went on for a year after that and Lt. Leach was still a 1st Lieutenant at the end of the war.

All of our company was upset about that, but none of the men could do anything about it. Lt. Leach was a good man and an officer the army would be proud to have. He was just a man who would not sacrifice a man's life without first doing a lot of reconnaissance to find the best way to attack the enemy. He was proud of every man he had under his command and we were just as proud of him. The army thought if an officer was not playing the tough guy then he was not a brave commander, and I truly think that Lt. Leach brought a lot of men back home alive that might not have come home otherwise. He was there fighting alongside those tough officers when the fighting was all over and a lot of the other officers didn't make it back home.

Now as I looked over the Command Post that day, I guess Lt. Leach could tell I was somewhat confused. He filled me in on the battles they had been in while I was away. I really think those were the toughest battles my unit fought and it happened while I was in the hospital. Sure, I felt somewhat guilty even knowing that it was not a fault that I brought on myself.

The next stop I made that day was to where my men were, in an old beat up house. I felt my heart drop to my shoe soles. It seemed

when I walked into the building that half of the men I had when I left were not there. There were a few new faces but not many of them. I could just see the shock in their eyes and it wasn't from seeing me, but the hell they had been through on the battle field.

My wife, Jewel, said when I returned home that I was not the same as when I left, and I knew that those soldiers I met that day would never be the same. Oh, yes, they were survivors and they would make it all the way home. We did lose some on the way to the Elbe River, where we met the Russians, but the most of them made it to come back home. And we who did will never forget how brave those who fell were in every battle we fought from France to the river where we met our allies.

I could call the names of some of my special friends I had all the way though training in the States, but this was different. These men I saw that day were all my friends and the greatest soldiers in the world and I would not let myself believe one was better than the other. They were all good soldiers and I was in their debt. After that day, when we were called on to go out front to patrol out the enemy I never said, "You go." I always asked who would go with me and I never failed having more men

to volunteer than I needed.

Now it was time to pull out from where I joined the company. That was near the Belgium-German border. They were already talking of the crossing of the Ruhr River, which was still many battles away. But when we left the little town we were in, we were headed in that direction. We always kept moving every day and moved at night a lot. We were made to believe that the Germans had moved back across the Ruhr River, but they always left a few soldiers along the way to delay us as much as possible and to drop as many men as they could. They called this "delayed action." We were being more careful now since we expected this to happen and we always sent out advance parties to spy out the area ahead. This way we were not caught by surprise. We pushed ahead as fast as we could, trying not to give the Germans enough time to build up a strong defense. We thought it best to keep them on the run while we could.

I remember the march we made the day we reached the Ruhr River valley. As usual it rained all day. The fields and roads we traveled were wet and very muddy. As we marched into a small village about 300 yards back all was quiet and the buildings were in good shape. So we set out to put guards

out where we thought they were needed. My platoon was assigned a house which was big enough for all the men I had in my platoon because we still were short of men. In fact, I don't remember a time after that when we entered into combat that I had a full platoon of 42 men.

I keep saying, "I this and I that," as if I was the platoon leader. I was only the platoon sergeant but we didn't keep a platoon leader very long because in war if the enemy could knock out the leader they seemed to think that would give them an advantage. That was so in the German army, but not in the U.S. army. The platoon sergeant was trained to be able to take over in case the platoon leader was knocked out. For my platoon, we didn't have an officer more than half of the time all the way across Germany.

I might say something about the countries I was in. France was, of course, where we first set our feet on land after sailing across the Atlantic. We didn't get close enough to view England. Then while we were in France we only saw a great lot of destruction, but it was still a beautiful country with its fields of orchards and its hedge rows. After we got further inland, there were a few homes still standing and still the people

there were drinking the cider they made from the apples they raised themselves.

I did get into Belgium and Holland for a short period of time. There I found both countries very clean and fixed up the best they could with war going on. The people - men, women, and children - were always very clean even down to their shoes. Some were still wearing wooden shoes, even their shoes were not bad themselves. Their buildings didn't seem to be demolished as some of the other countries were.

Then, of course, there was Germany where I spent most of my time. Germany was a very pretty country. There were small villages across the country. Most of them were just leveled from the bombings and shelling they took. The country homes were in good shape, and not as many of them were blasted as those were in the towns and the small villages.

When we would stop for a few days it was usually in a basement of a home because we needed the protection from the shelling and the bombing that we received sometimes. And, too, if the building had been destroyed the basement was still in good shape. We might have to move some rubbish sometimes, but the place was not

going to be our home very long. Then we were off and moving again, for the war was still on and the Germans were still retreating.

At this point, moving into our new quarters along the Ruhr river bottom was our last move until we launched across the river. We thought that would be anytime now, but the enemy had something to do about that. We knew there was a dam above where we were going to make our crossing so our commanders thought it wise to launch a sham crossing so they might test the strength of our enemy. When the sham crossing was done the Germans blew up the dam and this was actually what we expected. So the low land on either side of the river was flooded for days, and we were just going to sit back and rest while the waters ran down and got back inside the river banks.

We were enjoying our break there until our enemy found out that we were so close to the river. Then we began to get a few shells thrown our way and at night they tried to knock out some of our big gun emplacements by dropping a few bombs on them, but they had underestimated our anti-aircraft fire power and the bombing was over almost as fast as it began. We did lose some men in the artillery shell attack that they were shooting in our direction, but this

was done at random. Only one time we were caught off guard. That was at chow time, just about dark, when a few shells were thrown in. We lost about four men. The only one of them who died was a boy by the name of Henson, who was from here in Alabama just west of Tuscaloosa. He was a very good friend of mine and he was in my platoon. It was very sad as I stood on the ground behind the truck (4x4) as they drove away with the men. I saw a lot of my men fall, but I never got use to it.

I have a picture of Henson and myself that was taken somewhere back in Texas as we stood in front of a small country church. Really I didn't know Henson had died until I came back home in October 1945 and ordered the book of history of our division. It had the names of all the men who had lost their lives in battle. It was very sad to look them over and see the names of those I had fought along side of that wouldn't be coming home alive. My heart went out to all the families who had lost them. I can say they were all good men and all of them were my friends. May they rest in peace today, May 16, 1994.

The river was going down very fast and the crossing would be soon. The alert had been given and we were on standby.

The order came down about midnight to make ready every soldier, to be ready for the march to the river, and to be ready to start crossing at 2 o'clock a.m. That we did. My men were in high spirits and ready to move when the word was given. We knew it was going to be a bloody battle, and that it was. We were not to lose any time when we reached the river.

We thought there would be engineers there to carry us across, but most of them had already been wiped out. So we grabbed the nearest boat and paddled ourselves across, then let one man return to pick up others. My men made it alright because everyone knew there should be 12 soldiers in each boat. We did have some trouble keeping the water out of the boats where they had been riddled by either rifle fire or shells from bigger guns where they had been thrown in and exploded near the boats, knocking holes in them.

I was really proud of my men. Each one did what he was suppose to do and we were across in no time. The only big trouble we had was the boat drifting down stream as we came across. The plan was that there would be tow lines from one bank to the other side, but those were soon shot in two by incoming shells.

I remember how light it was there at 2 o'clock that morning. There was so much artillery being fired from our guns and the Germans' guns that it was almost like day, except this was a red light - like a beautiful sunset. I think I only lost one man in the crossing, and he was just wounded.

Soon we were advancing to the edge of a field which was believed to be mined. We could not wait for men with mine sweepers. They had been scattered as well. At this time there was only one officer with us and he took charge and decided we would get in single file with each man holding onto the pack of the man in front of him and being very careful to step in the first man's steps. The officer took the lead, knowing that he would be the first to die. Then about halfway across the field he stepped on a mine which killed or wounded about 4 or 5 men. Lt. Ernsdorffs was one of those who died in that small mine field. We had to stay in our single file and in doing this we had to step over the men who were down. I did stop long enough to look at them and found that the Lieutenant had lost half of his head. He had just gotten a battlefield commission and died shortly thereafter.

Those men would never forget the bravery of Lt. Ernsdorffs who

had just died there in that mine field. He could have ordered any of us to do what he did, but he was a leader, not a driver.

At the same time a little further down stream my friend from Gordo, Alabama, C. O. Burkhalter, stepped on a mine and a very young German soldier got help for him. Burkhalter lived after having both arms and both legs broken up. He told me a few years ago that he was a hospital patient for thirteen months, but he still has trouble walking and has ever since he made it home.

He (Burkhalter) married soon after returning home, then started carrying the U.S. mail. He and his wife had two beautiful children, both girls. At 35 years of age, the couple got a divorce and he raised the girls himself. While carrying the mail he went to law school and is now a lawyer in Gordo.

There was another friend of mine who was wounded after the crossing of the Ruhr river. He was sent downstream after we got across the river to make contact and try to get back to where the company commander's post was. He stepped on a mine and was out of commission for the duration of the war. His name was John Ball and he was from Minnesota. He is now about 75

years old and is almost blind. I met he and his wife in Nashville, Tennessee a few years ago and had a two day visit with them. He was using a walking stick then to help him get around. He and his wife, Minnie, were on a tour of the south with 68 other people. We had a great time.

Now we headed for a railroad track, which was our objective after crossing the river. That is where we would stop, organize and dig in for a while. At least long enough to count heads, and make a report on the dead and wounded. In this battle that was a great number.

Before reaching our objective we had to cross an open field with a barbed wire entanglement that we would either have to blow open or try to press it down low enough that we could get over it. That is what we did because with several of us pressing it down it was faster and we were out in the middle of that field in daylight and were in a hurry to get to where there was cover for us.

At that place was where I got the only wound in all the war, and it was not serious enough to report so I just let it be my little secret. While we were getting over the wire a shell burst nearby and sent a large piece of metal from

the shell my way. It hit my leg flatways, but still broke the skin and left a big black and blue place on the upper leg.

We made it across the open field without any bad wounds and, as far as I know, there were no fatalities. We were then near our objective - the railroad tracks. As soon as we reached the tracks we were told to dig in for the night. Before we had our foxholes completed the Germans must have zeroed in on us with their 88mm guns, for it seemed like it literally rained shells down on us for a few seconds and then it was over.

This was where we realized that the German army was weakening and were getting low on ammunition. There were getting to be less plane activity, but we knew they were fighting the Russians at the same time. We did lose a few men at the railroad attack from the shelling we took, but again no fatalities unless they died after leaving the front. Most of them were able to walk, or at least were on their feet.

We stayed overnight along the railroad tracks so that we could get the troops reorganized before another attack on a small village, which we knew was a strong hold from the shells they had sent our

way during the night. We also would have to attack over an open field to reach the village. We did get some unexpected support. About daylight there came rolling in some new tank destroyers. They were the first we had seen with 90mm guns mounted on them. The ones before had 75mm on them. These were hindered by the trenches the Germans had dug across the field as well as by the rain soaked ground. It was a tough fight that morning. We didn't lose many men, but did lose at least 5 or 6 tank destroyers. With them out of action we lost a lot of our firepower.

We soon were in the village and there I saw the most beautiful church building with a full basement under it. My platoon was going through it to make sure we were not missing any soldiers. There I was standing on the top step of the basement when a shell came in and hit the ground hear the door where I was standing. I either jumped all the way down the flight of steps, or the concussion from the shell blew me down the steps. I was not hit, but had a terrible ringing in my head and ears.

We made a quick search there and moved on. We were now looking for the next big battle which we thought would be the big River

Rhine crossing. Of course we knew there would be many more battles before the Rhine river, but that was the talk. Although we kept pushing forward, one battle after the other, the German soldiers would hold out for a while and then move back. By the time we reached the Rhine river, the commanders had decided to use paratroopers. Some came in gliders towed by planes and some of the troops jumped to establish a beachhead and secure enough ground so the engineers could move in and put in a large pontoon bridge. That way the ground troops, which was units like ours, could move by trucks across the river in greater numbers.

As we crossed on trucks we could see it was quite a battle.

But let me insert another story before going on because this involved me and a friend or two and had nothing to do with the fighting.

Of course we had a little fun along the way, even if it was dangerous fun. A way back from the Rhine river we held up in a small town for a few days and I know now it was for the purpose of giving the paratroopers and the engineers time to do their thing up at the river. But while we were waiting we found a building full of motorcycles. We had to try riding

some of them, so one of my men took me for a ride across town. There they had brick streets and it always seemed to be raining. And those bricks along the edge of the street were mildewed and had green moss growing on them. So the rain was coming down and we went around a street corner too fast, the bike went out from under us, and we stopped at the other side of the street. My arms and my side looked like it had been scraped with a fish knife. So that broke up our party for that day. We doctored up, but still we pulled out before we were healed.

This time the trucks picked us up and carried us to the other side of the river and as far inland as they dared take us. Then we began to travel by foot and we ran into a few small battles along the way. We had been told that the next stop would be when we met the Russians at the Elbe river, if we made it first we were to wait for them and if they made it first they were to wait for us.

So after we crossed the Rhine river we began to move very fast. There were even times we would ride on the back of tanks just so we could move a little faster. Other times trucks would be brought in and they would carry us for miles at a time, if we were able to bypass small groups of German

soldiers. We would leave them behind and usually when they realized we had come between them and their units, they would lay down their arms and look for someone to give themselves up to.

There was a time that Hitler gathered all his manpower as well as all the fire power and tanks, trucks, and even air power that he was able to get together for one final attack or, I should say, counter attack against the American army. I think it was bigger and stronger than our reconnaissance had reported to our commanders. The officials knew about where they were going to strike and our division was a ways south of the plotted area. But still we were alerted and told to keep a good watch out for any activity along our front. When they did strike it was with everything they had left that was still together.

They carried our armies all the way back very close to the Belgium-German border before our troops could get them stopped. This was a terrible loss of lives for both the Germans and our troops. There were other nations who lost a lot of men and equipment, too.

As I said, we were on the south flank of the attack, held up in concrete pillboxes, with about

4-6 inches of snow on the ground. We could at least get inside the pillboxes unless we were on watch. Of course there were not pillboxes in every area along the front.

That battle was called the Battle of the Bulge. I really don't know how they came up with that name. But every battle was given a name for identification.

We were moving by foot this time, thinking all the Germans had been cleared out of the area. We were moving in columns of two's, and there was a sniper who had been left behind as was usually done. He began to fire on us as we were crossing a field heading toward a farm house where we would spend the night. One of the boys had taken about all he could and when the sniper began to fire one of the fellows began to run this way and that. Some of the fellows caught him and got him quieted down until the sniper was taken care of. But this is so sad because some returned home whose nerves were so wrecked that they never got over it. I know my wife, Jewel, told me that I was not my old self for several years after I returned home.

Our plans did change after we got to the farmhouse. There we found a few dead who had not been picked up as yet, so I guess our

company commander thought it not wise to stay there since some of our boys were having a hard time with it. We made the dead as comfortable as we could make them look and had some food there, then moved on into the edge of a small village. That way the whole company of ours was closer together and more able to keep in contact.

We stayed there for several days for it was our time for a rest. We had been relieved a day or so before but had to keep moving so we would not to be left too far in the rear. That would make it harder to get in the fight if we were called upon to enter an unexpected battle.

At this stop is where I was called to company headquarters and told that I was up for a battlefield commission. The company commander and I filled out a couple of forms that had been sent up to us. I was told later that by the time the paper work went through all the channels the army was ordered to stop all commissions whether they were non-commission or commissioned to an officer. The reason was that the war was coming to an end very soon.

We were moving very fast toward the Elbe river from our side, and the Russians were doing the same from their side as well.

It didn't take long for our rest stop to be over. My platoon had confiscated a pretty red convertible and they couldn't take it with them, so they took it out in front of the building and knocked down a rock wall with it until it was smashed up really bad. Even though I didn't approve of this, I didn't have the heart to stop it. So we left this place with a busted down rock wall and a smashed-up car.

It seemed now that we were losing all contact with the enemy, but we went pushing on either by foot or truck. About the only problem now was the snipers they had left behind. Sometimes these were women or even young boys. We knew where our objective was and we didn't want anything to slow us down, not even the snipers.

We soon made it to the Elbe river and the Russians were not there yet so we had our hands full, taking care of civilians as well as army personnel who were fleeing the Russian army. They would wade, swim, or come across on small boats. They told us that the Red Army treated them badly and they did whatever they could to put themselves in the hands of the American Army.

I learned something from this that the Bible itself teaches - that we should love and respect our enemies. The soldiers came across the river carrying their weapons. They said they didn't want to leave them behind for the Russian Army. I suppose these soldiers had been instructed to carry the weapons to the American side of the river. We would have them stack the rifles up in a pile as they came by us. We must have had three or four thousand rifles up and down the river by the time the Russians reached us. The women and children who were able to cross were very worried about other family members they had left behind.

I got the shock of my life on an evening when my platoon was on watch as the people came across the river. Of course we rotated in shifts day and night. This lady came across alone, carrying a small bag of clothes. I guess she had already picked out the person she thought was in charge there. She came straight to where I was standing alone, back behind the boys along the river so I could observe most of our area. I decided maybe she wanted to say something to me. We didn't take much time with them because of so many people crossing and we were very busy taking care of everyone. But she came on and when she was in speaking distance, she smiled and

said "Good evening, how are you today?" Her English got my attention and I stopped and looked at her. She was standing there this time with a really big smile. I guess she saw the puzzled look on my face. Then she said, "I'm American." This really got my attention, so I asked why she was there and she began her story.

Her family came to America before she was born many years ago. I believe she said she was thirty-four and before the war she was writing a book and had come to Germany to do some research on her family and she got caught there when the war broke out and was unable to get a pass out of that country. So she told me the American Army was her pass back home to her family she had left in Detroit, Michigan. I wish now that I had gotten her name and address in Detroit. She did tell me her name but as soon as she left I forgot it.

The weather at that time was cold and those that swam the river, mostly soldiers, were just about to freeze. So we had someone go back with them to dry their clothes. Most of them had only the suit they were wearing.

In the building where my platoon was staying there was a big stove that burned coal and that is

where we dried their clothes. One night another unit was on duty and my platoon was inside. About midnight a German officer came falling in through the door. That man was already past talking so we took him in the room where the stove was, took his army uniform off and put him to bed to dry his clothes. He awoke the next morning and saw the guard in the room and was able to make the guard understand what he was saying. He wanted to know why he was there in that bed with no clothes on. He did remember swimming the river and that the unit on duty there had sent him back into town, and that he was sure he would freeze to death before he could make it. We were about 300-400 yards from the river. He dressed himself, and the guard carried him to the company command post. We never did see him again.

As long as we were in Germany we learned to speak well enough to communicate with them and they with us. He did show his appreciation for the fellows taking care of him. We also gave him some food before he left.

We got a report that some S.S. soldiers were holding up in an area near to where we were so I was called on to check it out. I did what I always did when I was asked to lead a night patrol. I asked

who was willing to go along with me, and my superiors always frowned on that. They thought I should say, "You and you will come with me." But I got better results to always say, "Who will come with me?" I never sent a man out to patrol an area unless I went along myself.

We did find that a small group of enemy troops was hiding in a wooded area near by, so we reported back that night with our findings. In the early morning of the next day a special group made an attack and found that the troops were a special group of German soldiers called the S.S. troops, which were suppose to fight to death. When the battle got hot a great number of them surrendered. After the battle there were sixty or more killed and some others were wounded. All of this was lives lost unnecessarily, because the fighting along the front had been over for three or four days. The reason I knew how many of the troops lost their lives there is that I was there when they were picking them up to carry them to their burying place. I had always been on the front most of the time I was there and had never seen the dead being recovered from the battlefield. It was very sad.

We stayed there along the Elbe river for many days until the

details were worked out with the Russian soldiers on one side of the river and we, the American soldiers, on the other as if we were getting ready to fight each other. But, thank God, everything worked out well and we were ready to start our long journey home, so we thought. But the army had other plans for our division, the 102nd Infantry Division.

Morale was really high among the men all the way to the top brass. Of course, our fighting days there were over and we could only think of home, families, and how long it would take to get there. I missed my family more than ever since things had slowed down, and my mission had been accomplished there. I'm sure all the other fellows felt the same way.

Instead of going home, we made a loop up into Czechoslovakia and stayed there for several days, not knowing why we were sent there nor why we stayed so long. But then when we left there we came back into France and there they began to process us out by a point system they had come up with to try to be as fair to everyone as possible. There is a lot of complaining even in the army, so the one who had the most points based on the size of his family got to leave on the first ship load that sailed. I was

in the first group that left the port of LeHavre harbor, France. We sailed from France on the "Hood Victory", a small ship compared to the one we sailed to France on. We made the sail back in only eight days compared to twelve days going over, but we had good weather all the way to New York harbor. We left LeHavre, France on October 7, 1945 and landed in New York on October 15, 1945.

In one of the battles earlier when we were crossing a large field with no cover to hide our approach, we were to attack a small village and it had been reported to be a strong point. At this time in the war the Germans were being pushed so hard that they would retreat as fast as they could, then when they had the time to stop long enough to dig in and set up their guns well, they would put up as strong a battle as was possible. Then they would retreat again with as many men as they could carry on the few trucks they had left. The others would surrender and would look as if they were proud their fight was over.

It was in one of those battles that when the order was given to attack Troy Jackson and a friend of his, both soldiers in my platoon, decided they didn't want to fight anymore. And as our troops went forward, the two of them shouldered

their rifles and headed in the wrong direction. Troy was a close friend of mine, as well as a close neighbor in civilian life. So I tried very hard to get Troy to not desert the battle but the other boy had him convinced that it was the right thing to do. I did not report this to anyone, but a few months later I got a letter from home and my wife wrote saying that Troy had been sent to Japan to fight there until the war was over. Then when I got home I found out that he had been made a mail clerk and had received a promotion while in Japan.

As my group was on the way back to LeHavre, France, for the boat that would bring us back to the States we came to a Red Cross stand where they were handing out coffee and donuts, and who do you think was helping the Red Cross? None other than the fellow who had talked Troy into retreating with him. I let him know what he had done to my best friend. Not long after Troy got home and married, they had a child and Troy didn't live to see him grow up. Troy died of cancer when the boy was a small child. Troy's son also grew up, got married, had two girls, and died before the girls were grown. It seemed to me like my friend Troy Jackson's life was doomed from the very beginning of the army career.

HOMEWARD BOUND

We left New York by train and headed south. Our first stop was Washington DC. We pulled into the station during the night and were told that there would be a few hours' layover, but I still think it was just a stop to let the boys let off some steam. And let off steam is just what they did! When we were ready to pull out some of them almost had to be carried out of the station to the train. The station had a bar in it, along with a shower and a barber shop. And the boys took advantage of all three places. It looked like a bunch of well-bathed, shaved and cleaned up group of drunks, but really, everyone did look better. I don't think anyone shaved all the eight days we were sailing and most of them may have not bathed. This was the first time we had even slowed down since getting off the ship. We did have great meals everyday since landing in the United States. It was good to be headed home!

Our next real stop was in Atlanta, Georgia, where we would be discharged from the U.S. Army. I don't know just what time of day or night we pulled into Atlanta, but

we were soon in our barracks at Fort McPherson, just outside of Atlanta. Fort McPherson was now being called the separation center. When I went into service it was known as the induction center.

We had just got settled in when someone came by saying, "You, and you, will report to the kitchen for K.P.". I think I was among the first to be called. But anything for a good meal, and that we had! That same day as I walked toward the kitchen by the long line of men waiting for chow, I heard someone call my name. It was my nephew, Paul Singleton. We talked for a while and I went on to work and saw him everyday after that until I left for home. That evening as I sat in my barracks doing "whatever", I realized that Leonard Horton was in the same building. So he, Paul, and I spent a lot of time together.

Now, Leonard Horton is one of my neighbors where I live. We are much older than in those days, but still able to do for ourselves. We both lost our wives and he remarried but I'm still single. Paul still has his wife, and all of us raised a family since the army days.

I got my discharge ahead of them and left the Fort and came by bus to Birmingham, Alabama. When I

arrived in Birmingham I had a short layover, and I remembered that the last I heard from Freeman, my older brother, he lived in Birmingham. So I set out to find him. I grabbed a taxi and went to the last known address I had for him and found the people he had lived with, but he had moved to Guntersville, Alabama. So that ended my search there and I came on home. When I got into Russellville it was raining as if the clouds had come apart overhead. There was another soldier on the bus who had been discharged. At the time of night we pulled in, there was only one taxi at the station, so the driver said "I will carry the closest one home first," and that was the other boy. We all got in and the driver asked the boy where he lived. He said he lived outside of town on a certain creek. The driver knew the place and had his doubts if he could get the fellow all the way home because of high waters. He said it had been raining for several days and he was sure the bridge across the stream he had to cross would be washed out. So when we got to the stream the bridge was floating in the water and the driver was afraid to cross. The boy was wanting to get home so bad. He said, "If you will sit where you are, I'll try to walk across." It was dark and he thought the lights of the car would help him see how to get across. We waited until the

fellow was across and we turned around, afraid of being stuck, and made it home about 45 minutes later and in a lot of rain.

We pulled into my wife and daughter's home and everyone got up. It was coming daylight by then, and we had a great reunion and homecoming with me having to get re-acquainted with my wife and baby. The baby seemed to be a little shy at first but soon came around. Jewel thought I had changed a lot, but decided I had just grown up and matured since we last saw each other. It took a while, but soon everything began to shape up and our lives began to take on a new meaning as a family. Upon returning home and as a family, we were proud that we had decided to get married and have a child before I left for the Army. I can't but just believe God had a hand in all that happened. The baby could have been born after I left, and that would have been tough for all of us. I thank God that it all worked out so well.

The three years I spent in service seemed almost like a lifetime to me and it must have been a long three years for Jewel. Her having the baby must have been a lot of pleasure for her. She lived for a while with her mother and dad, then one of her sister's husband was called up for service

and she moved in with them. Then Jewel took an apartment in Red Bay and she and Lorice moved in there. I think they liked there so much better, being just the two of them. She was able to have her friends for visits. Her family or some of my family would drop by and sometimes even spend the night. Then later on as the war was coming to a close the two sisters moved in together again. The babies were getting bigger then. Jessie and her husband, Marvin, had Virginia. She was almost the same age as Lorice. I think with the two of them, both three years old, they were ready for us to come home.

Jewel and I rented a house from Uncle Cleve at Good Springs in the community where we had lived before the war, and we really were happy to be together with our daughter. But we were not slowing down any. We soon bought a farm from my oldest brother, Dewey, along with everything we needed to start farming. We moved onto the farm and began doing our thing of getting everything in shape to begin farming in the early spring. It was October 22, 1945, when I received my discharge. Then in December we bought the farm and moved on it.

By the first of January 1945 we were off and running.

BACK TO OUR TRAVELS WITH THE ARMY

First of all, we started out in our home state of Alabama, then moved across Mississippi and a corner of Tennessee which carried us through Memphis. After leaving there we crossed Arkansas and into Texas at Texarkana, then on through Dallas and Fort Worth and on to Austin, Texas, where I was stationed nearby. Then we moved to Basdrop between Austin and Waco. Waco is where Jewel and Lorice went aboard the train when they left Texas to return to Alabama. Then after my leaving for Fort Dix, New Jersey, Jewel and Lorice came up by train through Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and on to Trenton, NJ and that is where we lived for the time they were able to stay with me.

I will certainly have to say that the Uncle Sam that I knew and loved, let us stay together most of the time I spent in the States while training for combat.

As I look back on those days in the military and remember so many men I knew, I remember what fine fellows they were and that some of them were like me in that they had a wife and baby back home, too. Then the thought of death

comes to mind and I remember that a lot of them were left on the battlefield. I would have liked to stop and see if I could help - sometimes we were able to do that, but not often because in war everyone is in danger of losing their own lives. As long as you are moving as fast as you can move, the enemy can't zero their guns in on you and your troops as well as if you were always in the same place.

HOME SWEET HOME

Now, as I was looking forward to settling down with my family on our little farm, there was a lot of work to be done. I started out by mending the fence around the pasture, and at the same time, thinking about my outbuildings and what would have to be done with them. The barn was in fair shape. But I would need to build a fence around the barn to make a "lot" to hold the livestock at night so the milk cows could be milked at night and in the morning. Milk was a great part of our diet in those days, and we just didn't go to the store and buy it. Milk was, then as today, used for about all the cooking we did.

With the fencing done and the barn repaired, we were ready to buy us a milk cow for our home use. That family cow was usually of the Jersey breed and was always a cow with a pretty cream color.

After that we began to buy other cows as we were able to do so. I always say "we or us" because Jewel was with me all the way. Even Lorice, passing three years of age, was always around and space to play in was no problem on a one hundred and sixty acre farm.

I don't think we were ever happier in all of our lives together. I had been home only a few months and we had our own home and a couple of milk cows. We hoped we could increase that number soon. We would soon fix us a chicken house and get a few chickens and I just had to have some hunting dogs around the place.

Now we had to have a bull on the farm to breed our cows. My brother, Bill, lived on a farm which came together with ours at one corner of the two farms. So we decided to buy us a bull together and both of us could use him until our herds increased. That really worked out well for us. We got a young bull and gave $200.00 for him, and we thought that was a very high price at the time. He was just a pet, and when one of us needed him we just went to the pasture, put a rope on him and he would follow us back to the farm.

We found out in a couple of years that he was worth a lot of money to us. Our herds began to grow! Soon there was a milk truck running through our community that picked up milk for a milk company in Tupelo, Ms. Then we bought a few more milk cows and milked them by hand. We had their calves to sell then, too. It seemed like things were working out well for us.

While we were selling milk and having a check coming in every two weeks, we thought, "Well, why can't we build a small chicken house, buy some laying hens and maybe sell a few eggs, and at least we would have all the eggs we would need to eat." We did build the house and buy the chickens and it worked out well until a company began building large housing and contracting to buy the eggs at a set price. When that happened, farm eggs dropped in price and we had to give that up.

Anyway, I began to take a class called "On-Farm Training Program" which was given to all the vets who would like to farm. Also, if a vet chose to go back to school to finish high school, or even go on to college, he could do that. I chose the farm program and that worked out well for me.

This farm program helped us very much. We began drawing a check from Uncle Sam that was $97.00 a month. This included one class each week in the classroom and we took field trips to Bell Minor, the Experiment Station in Decatur. We got a lot of insight into farming, which had changed some in the three years we had been in the service of our country.

I already had a very nice orchard on the farm when we moved there. The schooling, through our

instructor, helped me learn how to treat insects that would damage the trees or the fruit we grew. We had apples, peaches, and pears. We only had two plum trees but they bore a lot of plums.

After the orchard had been taken care of - spraying and treating for bores in the trunk of the tree - we began to plan our garden. This was Jewel's pride and joy for as long as she lived. In fact, I would get worried because she always wanted me to work the garden even if I had to leave something else off. I kind of blamed our farm instructor for this, because he was always preaching that the garden is your "bread and butter. You can use it in the summer months, then freeze and can for the winter months." I did agree, but there were other things that just had to be done. We always raised a good and fruitful garden.

Now I might add here that a baby was on the way. It would be another girl. Of course, in those days there was no way of knowing this. July 24, 1946, proved it was a girl and her name would be Hazel Onease. That added up to two girls and no boys. By this time Lorice was four years old, and began a baby sitting career at that age.

With two children, Jewel and I

were the happiest people in the world, we thought. Her parents were there some and we could see my mother any time we wanted to. And we had other company coming in now and then.

Everything was well so far, but I didn't know it could be so hot in July. I always thought August was the hot month!

That summer I did a lot of work in the field by myself. Jewel did most of the work in the garden that summer, then when it was ready for plowing I would stop from my field work long enough to plow the garden and the other truck patches - melons, potatoes, and other vegetables we grew outside the garden. We had to fence in the garden to keep the chickens away. I also tried to keep the orchard plowed to keep down weeds so the fruit could be easily gathered.

As early as I could that spring, I began plowing up my ground for cotton, corn, hay and other row crops I planned to grow that year. I was still working in the field when August began. Farmers always tried to have their crops laid by and finished by July 4, but somehow I could never finish my crops by that time.

The garden always had some vegetables about ready for

gathering and putting away for winter. My fruit trees included some July peaches that weren't ready before August 15th most of the time. Those would have to be canned because Jewel didn't like early peaches for drying. Of course we had no early apples. This type of work would go on all summer long, and into field crop-gathering. We were still gathering our crops by hand in those days.

We would only gather our eggs once a day. That didn't take up much time, so that gave more time for other things. And in such short time to get other things done, the cotton would be ready for picking by September 15. I usually hired some help for that, but still there was corn and hay to get in. And when I cleared a field of hay, I would get back as soon as possible to plant some for the cattle to graze on in winter. I always put crimson clover in with the grass I would sow. Then when the clover began to bloom in the early spring it was really beautiful. The cows would get up in the field when there was a snow on the ground and use their nose to move the grass and clover. The cows were ready for milking after a day in that. I would have to watch for bloat in the cows. If they got too much clover and not enough grass they would bloat. Sometimes I would have to tie a stick in a cow's

mouth so the cow could not close her mouth so when the gas came up they could not swallow it back. I never had it to fail me. Of course, if I had not watched them closely I might have lost some of them.

We were trying hard to save time as well as money. At this time, we were still without electricity. But we already knew it was coming before Christmas, and that would be a good Christmas present for all of us. We did have a pretty big icebox that we could keep milk and leftovers in to use in the next day or so. Of course, we had ice for kool-aid or tea, but this was when kool-aid was a big demand with the children and I drank a lot of it myself. I still like it better than tea, but there was always milk around the house straight from the cow. There was no such thing as buying it from the store in those days. But by Christmas we had power and had bought us a second-hand refrigerator. And by that time we were seeing and handling so much milk that Jewel had just about quit drinking what we had at home and we began to buy some at the store. We even had a rolling store that came by the house once a week. We bought a lot of the things we needed from that store.

Back in those days the only

way to save vegetables and the fruit we grew was to can or dry them. I remember one year we filled about 600 jars full, and then had bags of dried fruit. And there was a big bind of peas in the hull that we picked and put away.

Now all the time we were doing this, there were the cows to milk and feed. And the hogs, which I haven't said much about, had to be fed every day. And we kept one in a small pen separately that we would kill later for meat. That one had to have water every day. This was a very big job. We had to draw it from a ninety foot well.

The mules were a little easier to take care of at the end of the day. If I was using them, I would come in and take the harness off them and turn them loose. They would go get their own water and return to the barn for their feed. By the time they were back I would have the feed in for them.

This went on everyday, and some of those days we might have worked in the field for twelve hours or even more. But there were rewards along the way such as a beautiful meal on the table made from food you had raised right there on the farm. Others might be a newborn calf coming up with a cow from the pasture, or even a new litter of pigs you are looking at

for the first time, knowing all this would mean a little extra money coming in later on. Or even a rainy day, if it was the season for hunting, I would take the day off to go to the woods with my gun and dogs. By the way, I always had a few good hunting dogs. Then I would always bring back squirrel or some other meat for the table. This meant food as well as pleasure.

Then, of course, there were the weekends to look forward to. There was livestock to be taken care of, but that was all we did on Sundays as far as our work was concerned. We always went to church, sometimes by wagon and team, or we might just walk. Sickness was about the only thing we let hinder us.

Now let's think of the spring coming. We have just had a new baby, along with just getting power in our home before Christmas, and now beginning to plan for a new crop year. I'm sure we will be doing some of the same things we did in the year 1946. We thought we would get us an electric radio, and not get another electric appliance for a while. We were looking forward to the time we could get a freezer for our meats and vegetables, but this would have to wait for a while.

We were a little more experienced starting this year's crops than when we started in the spring of 1946. We were able to plan better because we knew what to plan for. We moved with more skill and the crops were planted out before we knew it. And the garden was much easier to manage this year it seemed. We were having one little problem, the cows it seemed did not want to come in from the pasture in the evening. We had a lot of woods in the pasture and late in the evening it was cool under the timber, so they would lay out until I would have to go drive them to the barn. We were milking more cows, and we had to start milking earlier in the evening, so I'm sure that made a difference in the timing with the cows also.

More cows also meant having to grow more feed for them. So the teaching I was getting from the On-Farm training school was to grow more winter pasture for grazing. So this meant that I would not have to bring so much into the barn for winter feeding.

As I mentioned before, I was going to school at least one day a week, and sometimes we would go to some experimental station, usually Bell Minor. I always enjoyed that because of the different things they were experimenting with, like different crops or maybe a

different strain of cattle or certain kinds of feed or even growing different grasses to raise for the cattle, keeping check on the gain or loss of weight in a certain amount of time. Sometime they would show a film of some farming operation in another state or even in another country.

Through the rest of the next couple of years things went very good. Hazel was beginning to want to go every time I started somewhere so we decided that Jewel could get more done if I just took her with me on days I went to class. I took her one day and after that she really wanted to go with me. I think the fellows liked her coming and the instructor didn't mind so she was a regular after that. I don't think Lorice ever wanted to go, but she enjoyed helping Jewel around the house.

There was another small house and barn on the place we had bought. For some reason my brother, Bill, and his wife, Earline, wanted to move into it. So they did and we all kind of farmed together for that year which I think was about 1948. The reason I wanted to write about this is that it was planting time, and the two of us were planting cotton that day. Bill had smoked for years. This was one of the many times he had decided to quit, so he threw

his tobacco bag down in the field. When I came to it I picked it up thinking it had dropped out of his pocket. When I reached him I started to hand the tobacco bag to him he said, "Throw that down, I'm quitting!". So I tossed it to the ground. We worked on till quitting time, which was pretty early in the evening because we had to milk our cows. We finished milking and had just began to eat supper when Earline came in. That was not uncommon, so I asked her why Bill didn't come down. She said, "He's in the field looking for his smoking tobacco." I walked out to the field and there he was on his hands and knees digging in the plowed field trying to find his tobacco, and he did find it and the habit was on again. Many other times afterwards he tried to quit smoking, until one day he had to have four or five bypasses done and the doctor saw how bad his lungs were and told him he would have to quit smoking if he wanted to live. He never smoked again. He lived for several years after that, but had a lung to collapse after that and was in and out of the hospital until he died on October 23, 1988. So if I smoked I would be scared to death all the time.

On summer nights that year all of us walked to church.

Now we are entering 1949. Bill and Earline have moved away after buying a farm nearby. So by the time the year was over we had another new baby girl, Martha Helen, born October 22, 1949. Jewel had a very hard time all the way through the pregnancy. She was bedfast most of the time, as much a five months before the baby was born. This had not happened with the other two children.

During this five month period, there were a lot of things that happened. My brother, Freeman, disappeared from Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he was driving a truck route running from Chattanooga to Miami, Florida and back again.

This was about the only route he ran, but we received a call from a service station in Chattanooga where he had his truck serviced several weeks before and he had not picked up his truck. This caused us concern and we began to wonder what had happened. My brothers, Dewey and Bill, and I went there to see what we could find out. The Chattanooga police and the city detectives were very concerned and began a search. They started with the place the truck was left. From there they contacted everyone who knew Freeman and that was quite a number of people. We made several

trips to Chattanooga ourselves, each time was a dead end. Then after four years I found him myself with a friend or two helping.

Jewel's father had come to help us work in the field that year. At a time for Jewel to see a doctor one week I drove her the doctor's office and took the children with us. Upon returning home we found her dad laying on the porch. At first we thought he was taking a nap, but soon found that he had a stroke while we were gone. All this was not helping Jewel's condition at all. Mr. Rogers lived about a week after that and he passed away. Of course Jewel was not able to attend the funeral. This was mid October and it seemed like everything was happening all at once. I just had to drop the search for Freeman and do what I had to do at home. I was just sure Jewel was going to lose the baby, but October 22 came and she delivered us a fine baby girl, healthy as could be. We followed the doctor's orders and things worked out just fine. After the birth of the baby Jewel began to improve slowly and by spring she was ready to start her garden like she could hardly wait to do each spring.

We continued to worry about Freeman, but all searching had gone no where. We finally started

turning to our own families and jobs hoping some day we could find out what had happened.

Martha Helen was born on that October night, and this was the third girl - Lorice, Hazel, and Martha. So after the battle we had been through with this one, we called it quits for good. I felt like if I should lose my wife I could never have the courage to keep going. We had several more good years together.

I must thank all our family and friends for standing by us through all the sickness and death we had in those days. I don't think we had to be alone through all those days, and there was food for everyone, and the children were taken care of through all this. Lorice, our oldest, had started to school and she was excited about that. She was going to the same school I attended in my school days and that seemed like many, many years ago. There had been a lot of things happen since I was there. There had been a world war fought since that time. Lorice's days there were short because the school was closed a few years later.

I remember how she was so carried away with her teacher, Mrs. Hester. She was learning so fast that Mrs. Hester contacted the superintendent and asked about

moving her to the second grade.

He gave his consent but asked Mrs. Hester to contact Lorice's parents. We were undecided at first, but Lorice was so bored with the work that had no challenge for her that we said yes.

And having done this she was much happier with her studies. We knew she would finish high school a year early and we didn't know how it would be with college, but all worked out well. Of course, this put her a year younger than her classmates.

Now Jewel's mother was with us a lot helping with the children and the chores around the house. Jewel was improving very fast and spring had come and the garden was ready to be planted and all the other crops were needing to be planted as well. It was like a merry-go-round and each spring we started all over again. But it was just like starting a new job and we always looked forward to spring so we could get started.

There was always new grass for the cattle, a new calf now and then, or a new litter of pigs, and sometimes I would get a new pair of mules and I would have to break some of them in to work. This was always a challenge to me, to see if I could make a good work animal out of them. Some of them broke out

well, while others didn't. If they didn't work out that meant another trade and another unbroken mule.

There was fencing that had to be done, and then I would start preparing the fields for planting. Spring was always a busy time. Of course during the winter months we would tend the orchard getting it ready to bear fruit. And then there were lots of other things that happened during any winter. I left a lot of things undone which should and would have been done, if there had not been so much sickness.

We always enjoyed our children so much, which I think all parents could say. But there were times when things didn't go so well, such as the time when we were milking about eight or ten cows by hand. Martha was probably not more that a year old and Hazel was three or four. Lorice was taking care of them along with her Grandma Rogers while Jewel and I did the milking. We began hearing the children screaming at the house, we ran to them and found that Hazel didn't want to help with the dishes and decided just to get hold of the table cloth and pull it off the table into the floor. When we entered the kitchen we were so shocked and amused at the same time, I don't think anyone got more than a scolding out of all this.

Now the half of the year 1951 was gone and we thought it was time for us to buy more land. We needed more pasture for the cattle, as well as more land to grow hay and corn for feed for our livestock, so we decided on the one hundred-ten acres my brother Bill had bought back in 1947. This land cornered with the land we were living on so we bought it, without any problem. Then we thought, "Why not just move on it, this way the children could stand on the front porch and wait for the school bus, instead of having to stand outside in the weather where we were living now." So we begin to do some work on the house at the new farm. In October of that same year we moved in and every way we looked there was work to be done, but we just kept on working trying to get as much done as we could. We did not have enough savings to pay for the extra land, so we thought it good to borrow the full amount of money that we needed to pay for the farm. All this happened without any problem at all. We were working and planning for the future with Lorice in school. The children seemed happy there. They could just walk to edge of the yard there and meet the rolling store, or peddler, as they were sometimes called.

But spring came, or March anyway, and I begin to look at all the money I owed the Bank in Vina.

The payments were set up to be paid in the fall, but I begin thinking, "What would happen if I were unable to make the payment that coming fall?" as if I didn't know. The more I thought the more depressed I got.

By this time I began thinking of all the people leaving the community for work in other states. My brother-in-law and his family were already in Illinois and making good money. I knew they would be home in February, so I begin to think, "Do I want to pull my daughters out of school and move my family away from their home and friends."

So on one windy March day I was mending fences around the pasture, and without a second thought I picked up my tools and went to the house and went over the plans with Jewel. She did not like the plans so well, but we decided after a long discussion that we would sell off our livestock and put things in order and I would go back with my brother-in-law to Illinois and get a job and my family would come later.

So we sold everything the next week except one cow, which I let the family that had moved into our other house have to milk. Then I left a fox hound for one of my brothers to keep, because we were

in the fox hunting sports. So this was the last of all our livestock and hounds that we owned.

It was during the move to Illinois that Jewel begin to have health problems, so after we got settled in Aurora, Illinois she begin to see a doctor on a fairly regular basis. He could not find any serious problems, but the prescriptions he gave her did seem to help.

We got Lorice in school there without any trouble at all and she loved it. The people who lived near us took day about getting the children to school and back, and that worked out real well. We were surprised to find that most of our neighbors were from somewhere in the south, and we felt right at home there.

It was while we were living in Illinois that the search for my brother Freeman (I spoke about him earlier) took on a new roll. I was working at the Barbara and Gran Company where they made large road machinery and some heavy equipment. The fellow I was working along side of happened to be retired from the Aurora police department. He was also very knowledgeable, so one day we got to talking about our families. He had a very small family and he was really carried away to find out I was from a

family of ten children. So the conversation led to where everyone lived, and that brought us to the point of Freeman's dis- appearance in 1949. So I told him the story from the beginning about what we had done trying to find Freeman. He said, "Let me try something." So he went to the phone and made a call. When he returned he gave me an address where I was to meet a friend of his who could help me to find Freeman. I will not mention names here because of the fellow's job who could help. That was friend helping friend. So at five o'clock that evening I met the man and did just what he told me to do, and he did some things himself. That put the plan into motion. Some weeks later Jewel called me at work, and said we had gotten a letter in the mail from Freeman. I noticed when I checked out at work that it was 9 AM and this was happening and I was almost flat broke. My brother Ellis and his family were up there working and I had a friend there from New Albany, Mississippi who worked at the same place as my brother. So between Ellis and my friend, Doyal Dunnum, we came up with enough money to get me a one way ticket by rail to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. By 9 AM the next morning I was getting off the train in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. With a cab waiting outside I was at Freeman's apartment in a few minutes. I had planned not to

identify myself right away, so when I got out of the cab I had him wait for me. I went to the door, and a lady came to the door (I learned later she owned the apartment building). She asked me to come in, as friendly as could be, so I thought, "What's going on here?" I still had not told her who I was, and there she was talking and fixing a place for me to sit down, (she was cleaning and things were kind of piled). I sat down with the cab still waiting, and was wondering all the time why she didn't ask who I was. When she mentioned Freeman, I told her who I was. Then I went out and paid the cab driver.

I wasn't fooling this lady at all. She knew who I was from the first time she laid eyes on me, then I felt like a fool. I found out then that they were expecting me. Freeman had told her about sending the letter, and they knew I would be on my way out there. She called Freeman at Dodge & Plymouth where he worked, and I talked with him for a short time. He said he would check out and would be home soon. In about fifteen minutes he pulled up in front of the building in an old '42 Ford car. We went up to his room and talked for a while. This was a very emotional time for both of us, because he had been missing for four years, and we did not know if he was dead or alive.

He got around to asking about everybody back home, and he wanted to know if our mother was still alive because she had been sick when he left. We talked about why I was in Illinois and all the other people we both knew who was there. We then got around to talking about his coming home. He said he was planning to come home in August when he got his vacation. This was May so I began talking to him about coming home now because I was afraid Mother would not live until August. After he gave in to come back with me, he could not get started soon enough.

We began loading his belongings in the car, which I thought might not make it home. When I asked him what he thought about it, his reply was,"If it quits we will leave in on the side of the road and catch a bus." Then I knew he hadn't changed too much, because that is the type of answer he use to give when someone asked a question that didn't need an answer.

So he made his rounds getting things squared away so we could leave. First we went by to pick up his paycheck. That took some time because the checks had not been run yet and they had to set up the computer just to run one check. Then we went to the bank to cash the check. After that we went to

the telegraph office to send some messages - one to our mother and one to my wife. Then we went to see Nadean (his girlfriend) at her hotel and he explained things to her. From there we went to carry some linens (he had borrowed) back to another lady and this was the hardest for him, I think, because this lady had a three or four year old daughter and when he told her he was leaving for Alabama she just went hysterical and clung to him as if she were his own child. Then we went back to his apartment for him to say goodby to his landlady. By the time we left there it was 5 o'clock in the evening, and we were on our way to Alabama.

Then sometime during the night he woke me up and said we had missed a turn somewhere back there. We backtracked for several miles, and he never missed a turn after that. It was all two lane roads then and they carried us through every little town and crossroads. I even began to think he must have driven these roads before because we had no roadmap to follow, but yet he knew every road all the way home.

When we came into the lowlands of Arkansas all we could see on either side of the road was water, in some places almost up to the blacktop. But we kept pushing on, stopping only to put oil or gas in

the car. I began to think we were putting more oil in it than gas, although it did not use much gas. By the time we got home (Bill's home where mother was staying) the old car had used five quarts of oil.

Coming across Arkansas we could see lights at houses with the lights glowing in the water all around the houses. It was beginning to get light in the east as we made our way along the highway toward Memphis, Tennessee. We stopped there for breakfast and then went on toward home about one hundred and fifty more miles, trying to make it all the way in that old beat up Ford.

We made it home sometime in the afternoon, and who do you think was out of the house first? Our mother, of course, because her prodigal sin had returned home safe and sound. She gave him a big hug and then said to me, "We would have never found him had it not been for you!" Then she realized what she had said and seeing the other children standing around she said, "Yes we would, someone would have found him." This broke the tension and everyone laughed, I think that was one of her happiest moments. Everyone there had a lot to talk about for the rest of the day and on until about midnight when everyone was ready for bed. I

think Freeman was a little uptight because he was expecting someone to ask where he had been and why he had left like he did. But no one mentioned it to him. Later on when we were together he filled me in on what he wanted me to know, and as far as I know he never revealed all the mystery to anyone.

There was a time when he was down in Mexico for a while. Then he was back in Oklahoma a while and then he finally settled down in Oklahoma City where I caught up with him. I found that he still returned to Mexico once in a while, and after he found Nadean they still went to Mexico on occasions. But I think these trips after meeting her were to flea markets. She loved them and so did he. A ring that I have and one that Nadean got after Freeman's death came from a box they bought in Mexico at a flea market. The rings were identical to each other, and I have been offered lots of money for the one I have. The fellow said he would like to make $200 dollars on it. That let me know I had a very good ring.

Anyway, we spent some time with my mother and soon went on to Aurora where my wife and children were. On the way home Freeman asked about work in Aurora and decided to go on with me and find work there.

I needed to get back to my work and I'm sure Freeman needed to work, so one morning we said our goodbyes and headed for Illinois. carrying plenty of oil along with us. We made the trip in about sixteen hours. We had only one flat tire which didn't take long to change. The car used four more quarts of oil on the way but we made it safely home. We found my family doing well.

I didn't go back to my old job and thought I would look around for a few days. Lorice had started taking music lessons from a lady who lived at Batavia, a town nearby. I went with Lorice and Jewel to the music lesson one day and while there we got to talking with the lady and she said her husband was night superintendent at a plant nearby. She said if I wanted a job she would call her husband at the plant to see if he needed any help. She did and he told her to send me down there, just a block away. I went and had the interview and was told to come in the following afternoon at 3 p.m.

I started there and made more money than I had made at the other place I worked. I told the man that Freeman was looking for a job and he told me to bring him in. Freeman came and went to work that very night as a machinist and made

much more money than I was making. The work was very hard on his eyes and he didn't stay there long. He went to LaGrange, Illinois and worked there for the rest of the time he was in Illinois.

He was going back to Oklahoma City about every other weekend. He would fly out on Friday and back on Monday in time to go to work in the evening. That was until one evening he went to work and it had been raining about all day. By the time he got off at 11 p.m. that night things were flooded all over. So as he came driving through an underpass, where the road was lower than the sides of the road, water had backed up above the road and just as he and other people got out of their cars they had to swim to the bank of the road to safety. He finally made it home after daylight. By the time we called a wrecker and got back to the car, the only thing
we could see was the radio antenna sticking up from the water. Freeman went out and dived down and hooked a grabhook on the bumper so the wrecker could pull the car out to where the cable could be hooked snugly. We got it out and the man said he would give $75.00 for the car and not charge anything for pulling it in. Freeman took the money and we went back to the house. Freeman didn't go back to work after that day. Then in a few

days he said he thought he would go back to Oklahoma. About three days later I carried him to the train depot and saw him off to the only place he was ever happy. Of course, he came back every year, as long as my mother lived, then when she past away on February 4, 1967 he started coming home only once a year, except when some of the family members died.

1973-1984

Freeman had a lot of sickness himself before he past away. In 1973 he had five heart bypasses done and did real well for almost ten years, made several trips home just fine and did a lot of work for the next nine years. He finally gave up hard work, but had cows and horses he looked after. He did a lot of horseback riding around his small farm near Norman, Oklahoma.

I was there with him through the first operation of 1973 and then the next one ten years later. My brother, Bill, and his son, Lowell, and I were there with him through the one in 1983. Each surgery was done in December. The doctor told Freeman he had less than a 50-50 chance of recovery and that if he had any doubts about his soul's destination, maybe he should pray about it. Freeman informed the doctor that he had no doubts at all, but we had prayer anyway. We felt good to pray.

He did have a tough struggle all the way through the operation but he made it. The Doctor talked with us about three days later when we felt we needed to return back to Alabama. The word was that the

doctor felt a year would be about as long as Freeman would make it. Ten months later while he and one of his friends were walking across a pasture, he died. The friend did CPR with no success. Then he went to a neighbor's house to call for help. The dog wouldn't let him in so he started yelling and explained what had happened. They finally got help, but Freeman was already gone when help arrived.

After that I received the call about his death. They told us the funeral home where his body had been taken. I contacted the funeral home we would use here and gave him the information I had received from Oklahoma. Our funeral home did the rest. It took about five days to get him to Alabama and he was laid to rest at the Wright Cemetery.

After we got Freeman laid to rest, I was the executor of his will. My son-in-law, Gilbert Prince, and I began the first of many trips to Oklahoma City and to Norman where the land lay nearby. Freeman's other property was within the city limits of Oklahoma City. If I had not had a good lawyer to take care of the will and see me through all this it would have been much worse. The lawyer was paid well. And it just happened that we looked up the lawyer who had made out the will for Freeman in the

beginning.

Also, my driver was not so backwards himself. We hung in there for four long years, getting it all settled. The oil wells were all shut down in the city limits of Oklahoma City, and there was a big oil slump and that caused the whole state of Oklahoma to panic. All sales of any kind of property was almost at a standstill across the state. We lost money on the land by holding it for a better price, but after four years of waiting we decided to sell and get it all behind us. We would have still been paying taxes on it if we had waited for a better price. Hardly anything in the way of property has changed since 1988, if anything it is lower now than then.

Going back to 1953

Now, with all that written, we will go to more about our stay in Illinois. Jewel's mother was having a lot of health problems and we were sure we would be going home soon, so I took the new job I mentioned earlier. I liked really well there, but the heat was almost unbearable. I had to work directly in front of a thing call a togae, which had 300 degrees of heat that heated 3-inch steel rods. That will tell you something about the heat. I don't know if I could have stood the heat, but I was working

with two tough men, who took my load when they thought I needed them to do it. One of the fellows had been on that job for a long time. The other was an old railroad man who could take the heat. The job paid so well that everyone wanted it. After staying there for a while I looked like I had been using a tanning booth.

The news came that we were needed at home to take care of Jewel's mother. I think we were all ready to come home anyway. But I went ahead and worked that shift, asked for my pay and got home about 11:30 p.m. My family had everything packed when I got home.

I had just bought an old car to drive to work, not thinking we would be coming home so soon. We had the car loaded within an hour after getting home and had sold the girls' piano on credit. I didn't expect to collect the pay for it but within two weeks after we got home the check came in the mail.

We stopped in town for gas where I had been buying it. The fellow on duty had noticed my front tire before, he said, and he thought I was crazy to head for Alabama with those tires. I really intended to buy some at the first all-night station I came to after leaving Aurora, but kept putting it off until I just gave up and

started thinking about home.

The night was long and the only stops we made were for gas and oil. The tires made it all the way home and they were still on the car when I sold it a few weeks later. The trip home took sixteen hours. The only excitement on the way home was when I stopped late during the night for gasoline. While we were waiting to be serviced I kept hearing a familiar voice inside the building. I went inside to pay for the gas, and the voice I had heard was coming from the back, so I walked back and found a cousin of mine with her husband. They were waiting for their transmission to be fixed. We talked for a while and then said our goodbys. As we left he said, "I'll catch you before you get home," and he did. When we were about forty miles of home here came this old Cadillac passing me and he must have been going eighty MPH.

We made it home safe without having trouble at all, and we were glad to be home. At home we found weeds in the yard as high as the eaves of the house. We did the best we could through the first day, but the real work began on the second day. And it did appear that we would never make the place livable. But little by little it began to shape up. This was now the latter part on October 1953.

Everyone who was big enough pitched in and before long the yard was cleared of weeds. The bedding and clothing were all put outside and sunned until they had a good smell.

This all went on until after the Christmas holidays and we began to plan the next year. My brother Tom had been farming the land so it was not all grown up with weeds. So I had no problem there. About one month after we got home Jewel's mother came to live with us. Even though she did not feel well, she was still a lot of help with the children. But she wasn't able to cook because of her eye sight.

By now Lorice and Hazel were both in school again, and they had adjusted really well and were making good grades. Lorice was eleven years old and Hazel would be seven in July.

Well our first Christmas back home was a day we would remember for many years. After being away for less than two years we were glad to be home, but we still had a lot of friends in Illinois. One family of friends was the Dunnum's who were from Mississippi. Later on they returned to Mississippi and we were in contact with them until they passed away.

Back to the children, Martha

was four when we got back home, in fact she had a birthday on our way home from Illinois. Her birthday is the 22nd of October and we arrived home on the 23rd of October. That Christmas might not be one that you would jump up and clap your hands about, but just think about having three beautiful girls and their mother to share any Christmas with, and about being back home after being away almost two years and no one holding a mortgage on your farm and everyone being is pretty good health. Wouldn't all those things make a man happy?

As the new year began it was time to do some fence mending and to put the pasture in shape. We planned to build a small milking parlor and get a milking machine and a cooler for the milk. Then it would be time to buy some milk cows.

I started checking the fence first and found the fence was in pretty good shape already. So we bought a couple of cows and put them in the pasture to graze until I could get started on the milk parlor. I hired one person to help and we poured the floor. While it set up we tore down an old house on the farm and moved the lumber to where the foundation was setting up. I called the milk company and they sent out a man to build the

ramps so we could milk two cows at a time to speed up the milking process. Within a month we were ready to set in the cooler and the milking machine. Within a year we would have several cows and then we were on our way. We didn't have much money when we came back to Alabama, but we did have two hundred and seventy acres of land with an old farm house that we could live in for several years.

We also had a good barn where we could store hay and corn, with a few stables which I would use later for baby calves. We raised them on milk sucking buckets instead of letting them to the cows. We owed no one anything on the land or the cows, it was all ours, and the Lord's, who of course could take it all away at any time if He wanted to do so.

We all did our share of the work. All of us learned to operate the milking machine, but then one member of the family would like to do one thing or the other and not like to do other things. So it worked out pretty well with each of us doing what we liked best, but when the chips were down we all did whatever needed doing. The girls worked as hard as the parents, without grumbling too much, but I noticed something later - not even one of them came back to live on a farm after leaving the home nest.

But if someone had seen them doing their chores on the farm then they would have thought they were enjoying it. I don't think I was forcing them to work so hard. They knew someone had to do it and they did the job.

All this time the other farming had to be done such as raising feed for the cows we had, but we grew into all this very slowly, and everything had to be done in its time. The planting was done by this time, and we could slow down a little, but the harvest would come before we got rested from all the work we had put into planting the crop. The girls were right there every step of the way. They hoed cotton, plowed a mule, milked cows, worked in the garden and even brought in the wood for the stove to cook our meals with.

1955-1956

The girls were now ready to start school again and even Martha would be going to school, and their mother and I would be doing more of the work around the place. They were all making good grades, and still had time for their chores around the house, as well as helping with the milking. A person who hasn't been raised on a farm would never believe how many different jobs there are to be done on a farm, and every job has to be done on a time schedule like any other job.

The farming went on as usual. I had been selling some timber off the farm to have a little extra money for this or that. Every now and then we would have to buy another cow or two to replace some that had gone bad, or to have the money to build a hog house. I thought I would try my hand at raising pigs for sale. I had had a few hogs since we came back from Illinois, but just for meat for us, and sometimes when we had an extra hog I would sell it. So I thought the pig business might work, but was I ever wrong! I lost money on every litter that we had. I had

five or six sows and they had litters of from one to six pigs each time. Then I had one sow that had a litter of twelve pigs, so, boy, I was happy about that! But within three days not a one of them was left - what hadn't died she had eaten!. So that was it for the hog business. I decided that if I could keep one for the table I would be doing good. Maybe I should never have tried it, but my dad had always said, "Son, you will be a good hog raiser." He had said that anyone who had hairy arms would be a good hog man. If he only knew how bad it was for me! I soon decided the milking business was better for me.

Jewel's mother, Ida Rogers, was living with us permanently now and her health was failing very fast. She was still able to take care of herself in the house and Jewel seemed to be at a standstill as far as her health was concerned. Jewel was staying close to the house, but still she would do the milking when I was late getting to the house from working in the field. I had been thinking of getting into the beef cow business and discontinuing my milk business, but I thought that would be a while coming because of the investment I had in it. But things just rolled on as usual, even though the milk was going up in hundred pound rate and that was based on the butter

fat content. We were doing better as far as money was concerned, but I was losing my help. Jewel was being tied down more with her mother.

And soon her mother was bed fast, and within a week she had to be waited on as if she was an infant. This went on for three long years with Jewel doing all she could for her. The children, Jewel's brothers and sisters, helped with her when they could, too.

Someone contacted welfare about Jewel taking care of her mother round the clock and she began receiving about $17.00 a month for being a nurse to her mother. We had no idea then who had reported this to the welfare department, and to this day, we have never found out who did it.

Her mother was drawing about $80.00 herself from welfare. Jewel spent all this on her mother and it usually was not enough to pay all her bills. There were the medical bills - doctors made house calls then and we lived eight miles from the doctor's office - and there were some special foods the doctor wanted her to have. Jewel's brothers bought some of that and they were a great help in many ways. Then Mrs. Rogers had to have all white gowns and bed linen.

Jewel thought this was a reason for no bed sores. This and keeping her really clean and changed helped a lot about having no bed sores. She lived until February 3, 1957.

I, and what help the children gave me, did just fine. The children just about ran things at the barn and helped with the cooking and other kitchen chores. And they never missed a day in school.

I had bought a tractor by this time and it was a great help at planting time. The girls helped in the field when they had a day off from school. One of the older ones would use the tractor to do the disking and I would use the mules and a two-row horse drawn planter I had. So with all going at the same time we did a lot of planting in a day's time. After Mrs. Rogers passed away, I don't think Jewel went back to the field to work, but we did still milk cows and she always helped out with that. We were increasing our beef herd hoping we could soon get out of the milking business all together.

We also were thinking about building a new house, in fact, we already had the blueprints. We delayed starting because we were about to decide we didn't really have the plan we wanted to use. We put that aside for a couple of

years, but did plan to get back to it later. It just seemed like that was not a good time to build with the change over from milk to beef cattle. Also, the milk company we were selling to was having some problems. They did offer to turn our milk over to a cheese company. That meant that we would be losing money by selling at a reduced price.

Things were just changing in all phases of farming, even in row cropping. And the small farmer was on his way out of the business. Beef cattle were still doing all right, but more and more milk was being brought in from other dairy producing states. So there was no way for a small farmer like me to go except with beef and raise what feed I could for them.

But before I could get established in the beef cattle business another change took place. This one really slipped up on me. It was in the fall of 1964, I had some cattle on the ridge field farm. I was there feeding my cows and I heard someone calling my name. When I investigated I found a fellow I had known so many years before that I had almost forgotten him. He said he had come to get me to work for him - I thought it would be politics and I wanted no part of that. He had been a politician when I knew him before. I

was wrong, but I was doing all right and I wasn't looking for a job. But the man had such a way with words that when he left I told him I would try the job for a few months. Who would have ever thought I would be selling insurance?

So, on January 4, 1965, I spent my first day in the business of insurance. I found myself 22 years later getting ready to retire from the business. I found I was right at home in the business then and after a few days I even looked forward to going to work. I also found that the man I use to know and got reacquainted with was no different than when I knew him many years ago. But he was determined to make me like the insurance business as well as to make money there.

I had worked five months and then had to have surgery. I laid up in Saint Joseph Hospital, Nashville, TN for 13 days and was out of work for almost four months. And while I was out the manager worked my debit everyday. That was the man that was going to see I made it in the insurance business. He sold for me the biggest policy that was sold on my debit in all the 20 years I worked.

So when I was able to go back to work, I went in one morning and

there was no manager. I asked about him. Nobody knew where he was. Three weeks later he was found in a hotel room in Birmingham. They took him from there to a rehab hospital. A few weeks later he was back on the job going wide open, and his intention still was that I make it in the insurance business. He never gave up on me. But then again his political ambition took over his mind again and he was back working for a big politician who was going to be governor of the state. So all that took my friend back to the bottle and this time it took over his mind, body, and soul. Within a year the doctor sent him home to his wife. She took him in and waited on him day and night until he died from a liver problem. From the kind of man he was I believe if he could have said anything to his friends he would have told them to leave the strong drink off.

My mother had been very sick for about four years. My three sisters, Merdie, Altie, and Rona set up a system to take care of her. They would stay with her in rotating shifts of one week each, and the boys would take one night at a time in a rotating shift. The girls could then sleep all night while the boys set up with our mother.

The doctor came to the house

in those days, if they could be called when she was real bad. A lot of the time the doctor would say, "I don't think she will make it through the night." That went on for almost a year and then one day she just went to sleep. That was a day we will always remember, February 4, 1967.

Mother's birthday was on December 22 and that was the day we had always observed. My dad's birthday was November 22, but he always wanted to celebrate for both of them on my mother's birthday. We did that for all the years she lived. After that we started getting together as a family on the first Sunday in June. That was 27 years ago and I think I can remember having it when I was 8 years old. That would be about sixty-four years that our reunions have been going on, and maybe even longer than that.

I truly hope that when all of the ten children are gone, that the grandchildren will keep it going. When they are older they will be glad they did.

Our family was always spiritually led to the church. We loved the church. We were taught to believe in the church and the love it represents. All three of our girls learned to play the piano at an early age. In our community

there weren't many people who could play. Some churches would ask one the girls to play for them at revivals and they were happy to help them out. The church would usually give them something for playing for them.

Even after going to work for the insurance company I still owned several head of cattle, but soon had to discontinue the milking operation and I was about ready to get completely out of the cattle business. I was having to work late about three nights a week, and my fencing was getting in bad shape. All this was more than I could do, so I decided to just work one job and then I would be able to stop by home and spend some time with my wife, Jewel, who was having some health problems.

In the beginning I just sold a few cows at a time, then I realized that this was a lot of trouble. So I found someone with a big truck and got him to come and we loaded up all the cows and took them to the sale. In one day I sold all the cows and could now go to work without worrying about some of the cows getting out because of the fence being down somewhere. I realized soon that I had done the right thing. If I had kept the cows there would have been feed to raise in the winter, which I didn't have time for any more.

My insurance debit continued to grow in size, but I kept the mileage about the same so the profits were growing. As you can see I was cutting back on my work load and would cut it back even more in the future. I didn't want anything to keep me from doing all I could for Jewel's happiness.

While we were still in the milking business the girls helped all they could, but they were getting grown and beginning to plan their own lives. Lorice graduated from high school and went to the Itawamba Junior College in Fulton, Mississippi. She went to school one year and then took a job at the Vina Banking Company and worked for three years before going back to college. She worked at the shirt factory in Tremont while going to college at Fulton for another year. By that time Hazel had graduated from high school and they both went to Florence State College in Florence, Alabama. They both stayed in the college dormitory the first semester and then Lorice got married and moved out but continued going to school until August of 1965. Hazel stayed in college and graduated. She also got married before she graduated. So the only time after that when they returned was for a visit. Of course before they got married they came home almost every weekend, and sometimes they would bring friends to visit.

That would make for a noisy weekend and it seemed to be noisy just about when I got ready to go to sleep at night.

Martha graduated from high school in May of 1967 and got married in July and then moved away to Birmingham, Alabama. It seemed that after they all got married that every time we heard from them they had a new address. This went on until a while after their mother began to be sick, then they began to move closer to home. They bought their own homes and I hoped they were back close to home for good. I cannot begin to remember all the places they lived around the United States. Lorice did live in Hawaii for almost three years and Martha visited Hawaii to meet her husband on R & R from Vietnam. Martha lived in several cities in Alabama after Loyd returned from Vietnam as his job kept him on the move for a while. Then Hazel lived in Ohio for a few years. So all of them have spent a lot of time out of the state of Alabama.

I have been very proud of all my children. They have given us parents a lot of joy over the years. They have given us five grandchildren, three girls and two boys all grown now and beginning their families. So we now have four great-grandsons, who are very handsome (to me of course). The

in-law's are all hard working and have done a great job of providing for their family's needs.

All through the 1970's it seemed there was one hill after another to climb. I didn't sell a lot during the 70's, but I tried very hard to keep my insurance debit collected good and to make sure I serviced my debit. The people wanted their insurance to be paid up when they needed it, if something should happen.

I would go home as often as I could to see about Jewel and see that she was alright. Sometime I would find the stove on, either the eyes or maybe the oven would be burning. She never left anything on the eyes or in the oven. Some days I would go home as much as three times only because I was always worried.

By then I was renting out the land I had. I had already sold one hundred and sixty acres. Then Lowell, my brother Bill's son, asked for two acres to build a house on. I let him have that and he built a beautiful house. Then after they got settled in he asked if I would sell eighty acres in the bottom. Of course, I let him have that. Then much later I let him have the eleven acres between his line and the road. Doing this left Jewel and me with about nineteen

acres with the house. That was all we needed to take care of.

At that time there had to be someone with Jewel all the time, and we still didn't know for sure what her problem was. Then in 1983 the doctor gave us the diagnosis. It was what we thought all along from reading medical books. The doctor said it was Alzheimer's Disease. Then I went and dug out our past bills and receipts and on the bottom of them I found the doctor had been writing the diagnosis as Alzheimer's for the past year or longer. We just had not noticed that on the bills before.

By this time all the girls were working and I had given up my job so I could be with Jewel. I didn't dare leave her by herself. I had to wait another year before I could draw my social security, but I thought the little savings we had would last that long. I thank God that it did. Soon the girls were taking off from work one day a week each to help me out with their mother. Then one of Lorice's classmates from high school called and said she had a couple of days free if I needed her, so it seemed that we could keep Jewel at home and not have to put her in the nursing home as the doctor had been advising for almost a year. One doctor went far enough to get a bed

for her and called a social worker to come and talk to us. She said that I, as her husband, would be sick if this went on much longer. We finally gave in when the doctor said she needed more medical attention than we were able to give her at home. She lived there a few days more than two months and on May 24, 1988 she passed away.

I was at a loss for a couple of years. I don't think anyone would see that as being unreasonable, after living with a wife for forty-seven years as I had lived with Jewel. It was not all rosey, but we had some of the finest years a couple could have. We did a lot of things together, both work and play. But one of the greatest things to come from our marriage was that we were able to have three lovely girls. And the greatest of all was that we taught them about God and salvation and that the church is for those who have been saved by the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sure, looking back, maybe we could have done some things differently. But the point is, we gave them the things that are important in this life and the life to come. I often think once and awhile now, "If Jewel could just see the family each of the girls have raised!" She would be very happy and proud.

I know we worked hard ourselves and the girls are still working as hard or even harder than we ever taught them to do. This I am not able to share with Jewel, but how happy the girls make me feel! Maybe God has a way of revealing these things to those who are at rest with Him.

Six months after Jewel passed away, I decided I would move and get closer to people because I always love to be with people and to socialize with them. I made a hit when I moved where I now live. Soon the house was sold and I moved into this apartment, which I like really well. By Christmas, I was organized enough here that we had our Christmas dinner here for the family.

I still drive back to my old home church for each service we have. I thought when I moved to Red Bay that I would start going to church here in town. But when I visited where Martha and her girls go and are members I decided they had so many people going there that I was not needed as much as I was needed at my home church in the Hurricane Creek Community at Goodsprings Freewill Baptist Church. So as long as I am able to drive the eight miles there, I'll just keep going back there for services.

I'm enjoying being free to do the things I've never been able to do before. I visit the hospital and the nursing home about every week. I visit my brother Ellis and his wife sometimes twice a week. I always take a walk every day. Then I go to visit people who are not able to get away from home very much. I'm usually with my pastor at least three Sundays each month. When I was a young man, the church members always rotated in feeding the pastor and entertaining them each Sunday. But it seems the younger generation don't have time for that anymore, or maybe their love for the church is not strong enough. This is what Paul told the Romans, chapter 1, verse 15: "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring tidings of good things!" So this reminds me that a true gospel preacher deserves the respect of the church, to be taken care of by the church, and the very least we can do is to feed them dinner on Sunday when they drive fifty miles one way to get to the church.

It is now 12 o'clock midnight and I'm sitting at my desk writing and studying about the past five years that I have lived alone. I try to think of ways to keep from getting depressed or lonely. You might say that I'm lonely by being

here at midnight, still not in bed. But that is not the case here tonight. I've been working real hard for the past two days getting ready for our family reunion on tomorrow, and I guess you can say I'm so excited I can't sleep. But I'm not depressed or lonely.

Some two years ago I had this dream of my wife, Jewel. I may have mentioned this in writing earlier, but I will give the full details now and might tell of other dreams I've had of her in these past five years.

This time I was sleeping with my face toward a window which was by my bed, and the curtains got my attention as if the window was open and they were blowing in the wind. So I looked at the window and the shades also were blowing inward like the curtains were doing. So my thoughts were that I had left the window open and forgot to close it. Of course I continued to gaze at the window and noticed the shade and curtains were going higher and higher as the wind continued to blow.

As I looked I noticed someone sitting on the side of the bed and soon I recognized it was my deceased wife, Jewel. I noticed her hair first and thought, "Well, Martha has fixed her hair in a french twist." Martha, being a

beautician, had always done her mother's hair. It was so pretty! And the gown she was wearing was as white as cotton itself, but still her back was to me and she had not moved at all since I noticed her there while the curtains and the shades continued to blow upward. They soon blew up and stayed up in midair as Jewels body began to lift from the bed, still in a sitting position, and her back was still toward me. As I watched in amazement she went up and up until she disappeared out the window and when she was gone the shades came slowly back into place as if they were never disturbed. This is when I awoke, neither disturbed nor afraid, but I had a feeling of relief. But the thing that amazed me most was the fact that I never was able to see her face through the whole ordeal.

Oh, sure, I still dream of Jewel once in a while, but never had a dream of her as real, before or after that night. Hazel, who works in the field of that nature and has some psychology training, seems to think this was the beginning of my letting go after the death of my wife. I really was able to relax more after that. I was even able to sleep better at night and I seemed to want to get on with my life as if I had just come to the realization that I was alone and that was the way it is

and it will be. Then I began to look forward to the future, instead of looking back on my past troubles. My church work began to come back into focus again for me. A lot of things began anew in my life.

I am now very happy with my lifestyle and the work I do. A lot of that work is being able to help other people, and I don't mean in silver and gold, but in seeing a face light up when I visit people in the nursing home or the hospitals, or sometime it might be in the home of someone who is housebound. And, too, my joy is always as great as theirs. The only problem is that I don't have enough time in a day to do all the things I would like to do. I do go to the senior citizen center for dinner about every week day - Monday through Friday.

Today, June 5, 1994 my brother Thomas, that I spoke about earlier in my writing, was laid to rest in the Wright cemetery where most of our family is buried. But let me go back in time now and begin with the oldest brother of the ten children. Dewey and his wife Lydia were also laid to rest in the Wright cemetery as were Merdie and husband Enos, Altie and husband Monie, and Rona and husband Hollis. Then Freeman, who never married, was buried there. My wife Jewel is

buried there, as were my mother and daddy, Clem and Will Humphres. Bill and his wife Earline were buried at Pleasant Ridge No. 1. Shottsville Cemetery is where Chess and his wife Rena are buried. So this leaves Ellis and wife, Viola, and myself living today and who knows which one of us will be next? And we also will be buried at Wrights cemetery. Thomas' wife, Beadie, is near death right now and looks like she can't live very much longer.

So this is how it looks with the ten brothers and sisters of the Humphres family.

Let me give a brief summary of my family.

Let me tell you about myself. I grew up on a farm in the farming country of Franklin County near Vina and Red Bay, Alabama. I began my education at the Hurricane Creek Church, which in those days was also the school. Then later on the community and the school board, thought it best to bring the three schools in our community together by consolidating them (Hurricane Creek, Goodsprings, and Ebenezer). This was done and they named the school the "Hurricane Creek School" and it carried each student through the ninth grade.

I made my way to finish there and went to Vina High School for the tenth grade. Then for reasons I explained earlier I dropped out to support myself and my mother. I began to work and later got married to Jewel Rogers. Then I entered the armed forces. After the war I came home and tried to take up where I left off.

Jewel grew up moving from one community to the next and from school to school. Her people moved to Alabama from Mississippi and began her education, I believe in the fourth grade, here in Franklin

County. She made it through the sixth or seventh grade. Then sometime later we were married and with one child she followed me through Texas and across the states to New Jersey. Then we were separated for three years while I fought the Germans. After that we were together until death separated us.

Our oldest daughter, Lorice, began her schooling at the Hurricane Creek school. While there she passed first and second grades the first year. She was there until our move to Illinois.

When we came back to Alabama she and Hazel both went to Vina High School. She finished high school there in 1959 and went to Itawamba Junior College in Mississippi for one year, took a job with Vina Banking Company for about three years, then went back to IJC for another year. By that time her sister, Hazel, was finishing Vina High School, so they both went to Florence State College together. Lorice married while there, but went on to get her degree in Art and Secretarial Science. She married Gilbert Prince of Florence on January 27, 1965.

Hazel, the second daughter, went from Vina High School to Florence State College along with Lorice because she wanted to get

into a four year college right away. She also married while in college. She married Jerry Askew and went on to finish college with a degree in History and Library Science. She taught school in Birmingham, Russellville, and at Vina High School. They moved away to Columbus, Ohio and she lived there for a while then she and the children came back to Russellville and she took a job with Riverbend Hospital in Florence. She is still working with them as a field agent, seeing mentally handicapped patients.

She is now married to Jeff Pennington and lives in Russellville where her office is located. Jeff works as a construction worker on large construction jobs. They were married July 10, 1987.

Martha began her education at Vina High School. She finished there in May 1967 and got married soon afterward. She and Loyd Ozbirn were married on July 7, 1967. Loyd had a job in Birmingham with a smoke stack company, but soon went to work for Bowman Transportation Company. They left to go there soon after marriage. Martha went to Cosmetology School while they lived in Birmingham and worked as an instructor for the college there for a while. They moved to Selma where she worked as an operator for Southern Bell.

Then they moved to Montgomery. and with a few more transfers, they are now settled down in Red Bay, I hope. She works with Rural Health as an adult Day care assistant.

Now the grandchildren are all about grown and on their own, but there are some great-grandchildren coming along.

Here are the names of my children with their families.

Lorice and Gilbert Prince
Son Steven and Cameron Prince and their sons, Christian and Alec

Hazel and Jeff Pennington
Daughter Jeannie and Chad Epperson and their sons, Casey and Dylan
Son Mike Askew

Martha and Loyd Ozbirn
Daughters Lori and Heather

MOTHER,
The real one the children never knew

I am not writing this to make anyone sad.

Girls, your mother was the greatest person I have ever met. The only reason I have never discussed this with you is that I just couldn't find the words. As all of you know, I can put things in writing that I could never say with my mouth. Oh sure, I talk a lot - even too much most of the time - but when I really have something to say from the heart, I make it better with pencil and pad.

Starting back when we were young and even before we married, Jewel was full of life. I remember the first time I took her home from church. It was not really a date. I was with Idines Holland, my cousin, and he was dating your Aunt Rosie. They would have me walk Jewel home, so I did and she was a barrel of fun. They lived at the Buck Parker place, later the C. C. Blackburn place, across from Hurricane Creek Church.

When we got home, they told us about Mr. Parker's watermelon patch. Jewel said if Idines and I would go carry the melons back to the house, she would go and show us where it was located. Her mother refused to let her go, so she slipped out the back way and went anyway. We got the melons and carried them to the house, but the deal was that we had to stay until her mother went to bed. She said by morning her mother would be cooled off and wouldn't whip her. Until this day I don't really know what happened, but I think she got the whipping because if she had not she would have told it right away.

How there was the time when her sister was with us at church and she ran ahead when we were one our way home. Her mother sent her back to walk home with us and Jewel knew what would happen. So she said, "We will watch for her and then hide and let her pass and then walk on to the house. Jessie never found us and went all the way back to the church. Everyone had left the church so she came back and again Jewel almost got another whipping.

When we go married and we started farming she wouldn't stop until I bought her a mule to plow. She said she could plow as good as I could, and she could do just that. I was almost jealous of that

old mule, because she thought so much of it and took such good care of it. But I couldn't have found one that was better for her.

Then, of course all of you know about how she could sit down and write a poem just about any time. Even before we were married when we would be going by foot to some place she would start singing a song I had never heard. I would remark that I had never heard that song, she would laugh and say, "I haven't either!"

When we went to church at night and would be walking home with a road full of young people she would start telling ghost stories just to get the younger ones afraid.

Well, you might say she was down right mean, but that is not so. She was the sweetest, liveliest person and the most fun of anyone you would ever know. Everyone loved her, except this one girl who was always after me. When I decided to let her go and go steady with Jewel the girl told Jewel, "You can have him, he don't have no clothes except one old brown pair of pants." That was about the truth. Jewel said, "Well, if it's the clothes you want you will have to leave this community. We are all poor folk around here.

There was a business side of her also. Her dad always worked in public works and the rest of the family would hoe cotton for farmers in the spring and pick cotton in the fall. Somehow Jewel was always asked to keep the books on how much each person picked and to figure each person's pay. Sometimes there would be so many people picking cotton until she didn't have time to pick herself. They would just pay her about what everyone else made that day. In those days people who hired work done would pay each day in the evening.

There was one time when she and her family lived on Enos and Merdie's farm and I lived at our home place across the creek from where Roy Humphres lived. We walked all over the country to church and it was a long way for me to walk back home after walking her home. So I would just go part way and turn back to our house. On one really dark night I was sure I was not going all the way that night, but she had other plans. When it was time for me to turn back she said, "No, you are a big boy and will have to go all the way tonight." And, mind you, this was on a trail through the woods with no light for me on the way back and all by myself! In a couple of days I got a letter from her. She wanted to know if the boogers got

me. That was when I knew she did this just for devilment.

Another time during winter, on a cold rainy day when my mother had been sick for a long time, almost since we lost my Dad, Jewel and my cousin Bunnie Holland came to stay with us. I guess my aunt had sent them over. But they came anyway and I don't think they hardly stopped all day, cooking and cleaning. That was the serious side of Jewel and I think this was why everyone loved her so much. She was always helping people like I've just told you. She also read the Bible to older people. She told me she had been reading the Bible to people since she was a very small child and had learned to read good before she started to school.

I love thinking of our lives together. I even loved taking care of her when she was sick. It always worried me because I couldn't do more for her. I have no regrets now of doing what I could and would do it again if it were possible.

There was a time many, many years ago when we were in about the sixth grade that our bus driver took some of us from school to Shiloh Battle Ground. I was trying to be with Jewel that day, so we had been to about every place there

except for the boat ride. We went down to the river to see what it would cost. Between the two of us we only had enough money for one of us to ride the boat. I was going to let her take the ride, so we got our money together and went down to buy the ticket. That is where she backed out. She was, as long as she lived, afraid to spend the last dime. I'm sure I would have spent our last saving had it not been for her. She was not only good at planning, but she was a good manager as well. We had a good time that day, because neither of us had been much further away than Vina at that time.

She was a fine woman!